Neutrality in conference interpreting: influence of mode (simultaneous versus consecutive) on the neutrality of the interpreter

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* MA Thesis was written in collaboration with Natalia Neznamova
1. Introduction .................................................................................................................. 5

2. Definition of neutrality .................................................................................................. 6
   2.1. Meanings of ‘neutrality’ ......................................................................................... 6
   2.2. Neutrality in psychoanalysis ............................................................................... 8
   2.3. Neutrality in politics ............................................................................................ 9
   2.4. Neutrality in humanitarian affairs ...................................................................... 10
   2.5. Neutrality in translation ...................................................................................... 11

3. Defining Mediation ........................................................................................................ 12
   3.1. What is mediation? ............................................................................................... 13
   3.2 Types of mediation: problem–solving mediation VS transformative mediation ....... 17
   3.3. Behavior and strategies of the mediator .............................................................. 19
   3.4 Neutrality in mediation .......................................................................................... 24
      3.4.1. Definition ...................................................................................................... 24
      3.4.2 Theory vs practice ......................................................................................... 25

4. Neutrality in conference interpreting ........................................................................... 27
   4.1 The mediation element in the work of interpreter .............................................. 28
   4.2 Conference interpreting and community interpreting ......................................... 29
      4.2.1 Setting ........................................................................................................... 30
      4.2.2 Participants .................................................................................................... 30
      4.2.3 Level of training ............................................................................................ 31
      4.2.4 Level of professionalization ......................................................................... 32
   4.3 Perceptions and norms regarding neutrality in conference interpreting ............ 33
      4.3.1 Perceptions of the interpreter’s role ............................................................... 33
      4.3.2 Conference interpreters’ code of professional behavior ............................... 35

5. The conference interpreter’s neutrality in the consecutive and simultaneous modes .... 36
   5.1 Consecutive mode—definition ............................................................................. 36
   5.2 Whispering mode—definition ............................................................................. 37
   5.3 Simultaneous mode—definition .......................................................................... 37
   5.4 Neutrality criteria .................................................................................................. 37
   5.5 Method of mode analysis ...................................................................................... 38
   5.6 Neutrality in the consecutive interpreting mode: analysis ................................ 39
      5.6.1 Physical location ............................................................................................ 39
      5.6.2. Means of intervention .................................................................................. 40
      5.6.3 Time constraints ............................................................................................ 42
   5.7. Neutrality in the simultaneous interpreting mode of interpreting: analysis .... 42
      5.7.1 Physical location ............................................................................................ 43
      5.7.2 Means of intervention .................................................................................... 44
      5.7.3 Time constraints ............................................................................................ 45

6. Conclusion .................................................................................................................... 48

7. Bibliography .................................................................................................................. 51
1. Introduction

The question of neutrality in conference interpreting is quite a challenging subject, especially given the lack of scholarly interest in this topic. The neutrality of interpreters and their mediating role have been discussed mostly in the works of scholars focusing on community interpreting. “In Community Interpreting Research, the focus of many studies has been on how the mediation of an interpreter influences the interaction and the relations between the interlocutors, how it reveals, represents, reproduces and occasionally restores power differences between individuals, as well as between individuals and institutions or society at large” (Diriker, 2004:2). Research on conference interpreting has been centered upon cognitive aspects of interpreting, with simultaneous interpreting as a main focus of attention. Diriker writes that with Interpreting Studies in general it is possible to say that the attention of scholars has been devoted “to the most salient types and features of interpreting (i.e., conference interpreting as the most salient type and cognitive aspects of the task as the most salient feature)” (2004:1). According to Diriker, “less attention has been devoted to simultaneous interpreting as “situated action”. That is to say, the position of conference interpreters as individuals and professionals working and surviving in socio-cultural contexts, and the interdependency between the socio-cultural contexts and the presence and performance of conference interpreters have not been among the major fields of research in Interpreting Studies” (2004:1-2). If we view interpreting as a situated interaction where all the participants actively interact with each other we will have to look more closely at the interpreters’ role. The notion of neutrality is central to the definition of the role the interpreter plays as a person “in the middle” between two different parties. It is essential for aspiring interpreters to understand the concept of neutrality and the extent to which it can be applied in the context of conference interpreting. After all, interpreters should not merely be language-processing devices. In our paper we will therefore explore what it means to be neutral and whether or not or to what extent the issue of neutrality is relevant for different interpreting modes.
The subject of neutrality (or impartiality, as it is often termed) has been studied in such fields as politics, psychoanalysis and sociology. The “neutrality” of a person can only be defined in relation to other subjects of interaction. Someone’s neutrality can only be assessed against the background of the person or object they are neutral towards. This question is relevant in the case of an individual who is placed between two or more parties, such as an interpreter. The subject of neutrality is actively discussed in the field of mediation,¹ and the neutrality of a mediator (as we will see later) is a controversial issue.

In the following chapters we will first discuss different definitions of neutrality (Chapter 2) and mediation (Chapter 3). We will then approach the issue of neutrality in conference interpreting by comparing it to community interpreting (in Chapter 4). Following this, and adopting the most suitable definition of neutrality, we will analyze different modes of conference interpreting: consecutive and simultaneous (Chapter 5). Finally, in Chapter 6 we will formulate the conclusions of our study.

2. Definition of neutrality

In this chapter we will focus on the concept of neutrality and will analyze it from different angles. A full understanding of different aspects of this concept in a number of fields will help us to be comprehensive in our approach to analyzing neutrality in interpreting.

2.1. Meanings of ‘neutrality’

Looking into the etymology of the word “neutrality”, we see that the term “neutral” is derived from the Latin “neuter”, meaning “neither one nor the other”. In the Online Etymology Dictionary we read that in the 14th century the term “neuter” acquired the meaning of “neither masculine nor feminine”, while as early as the 16th century it referred to “taking neither side, occupying a middle position” (etymonline.com). The first documentary evidence of the term being used to mean “not taking sides in a fight”

(idem.) was recorded in the 1540s, although it most probably existed with a similar sense in Medieval Latin (idem.). The modern meanings of the term “neutral” comprise:

- neither active nor passive
- not taking part in either side of a controversy
- not taking part in a war; giving no active aid to any belligerent
- not being aligned with, supporting, or favoring either side
- belonging to neither extreme in type, kind, etc.; without strongly marked characteristics; indefinite, indifferent, middling, etc.²

On the basis of these definitions, we can conclude that “being neutral” means having no personal interest, approaching a subject matter with an open mind, not being affiliated with either side; the antonym would be to be involved or engaged. Although many definitions of this term exist in various dictionaries, encyclopedias and thesauruses, James W. Vice argues that, “Neutrality is not something to be given an explicit and essential definition. Neutrality is not an essence; it is an absence. We must dance around it with enough synonyms and examples to be able to recognize when it isn’t present.” (Vice, 1997).

The complexity of the definition of neutrality is relevant to cases where the term is used in studies in the social sciences; this is the subject of the following subsections. On the other hand, precise definitions of neutrality exist in the natural sciences, such as physics or chemistry. The most common example of “neutrality” is known even to high school physics students: in electrodynamics, a body is considered “neutral” if its electric charge is equal to zero so that it does not participate in electromagnetic interactions (Jackson, 1999). Generally, in physics a “neutral” or “not charged” body is, by definition, a body not participating in the interaction. “Neutral” is therefore always “neutral with respect to certain types of interaction”. As a matter of fact, this aspect of the definition of neutrality

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is also useful for understanding the general definition of neutrality: a “neutral” body (a neutral person) is a body (person) not participating in the interaction.

2.2. Neutrality in psychoanalysis

In their major work The Language of Psychoanalysis, French psychoanalysts and philosophers J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis gave a comprehensive definition of neutrality in psychoanalysis. They argue that neutrality is:

“Une des qualités définissant l’attitude de l’analyste dans la cure. L’analyste doit être neutre quant aux valeurs religieuses, morales et sociales, c’est-à-dire ne pas diriger la cure en fonction d’un idéal quelconque et s’abstenir de tout conseil ; neutre en regard des manifestations transférentielles, ce qu’on exprime habituellement par la formule « ne pas pénétrer dans le jeu du patient » ; neutre enfin quant au discours de l’analysé, c’est-à-dire ne pas privilégier a priori, en fonction de préjugés théoriques, tel fragment ou tel type de significations” (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1967: 266).

Neutrality, along with anonymity and confidentiality, is the basis of codes of ethics for psychoanalysts, and these notions are included in Freud’s recommendations (Freud, 1912). It is interesting to note, though, that Freud never used the term neutrality; rather, this was Strachey’s translation of the German word Indifferenz (Person et al., 2005).

In his Recommendations to Physicians Practicing Psychoanalysis (1912), Freud advises the analyst neither to give the patient direction as to choices in his/her life nor to assume the role of teacher or mentor. In the opinion of Laplanche and Pontalis, that is precisely what he meant by being neutral.

Neutrality is considered as essential when administering psychoanalytical treatment; it must be an attitude and a norm of behavior for analysts. Nonetheless, the expression of “benevolent neutrality”, which comes from diplomatic language and is used to define the behavioral stance of psychoanalysts, is not mentioned by Freud (De Mijola, 1987). He speaks of neutrality as an important element of the treatment; in this technique neutrality is central to the proper evolution of an analytic process.
Freud’s recommendations are not generally contested by analysts, but some argue that the neutrality maxim might be illusory and force the analyst into self-deception. For example, Diaz argues that expecting neutrality from a human being in therapy is not always possible (Diaz, 2008).

2.3. Neutrality in politics

According to the definition given in the US Foreign Policy Encyclopaedia (americanforeignrelations.com), the term “neutrality” in international affairs is,

- generally used to designate the legal status under international law of a sovereign state that seeks to avoid involvement in an armed conflict between belligerent states, protect its rights, and exercise its responsibilities as a neutral. Consequently, a neutral state under international law or practice asserts that it has the right to remain at peace and prohibit sovereign acts by belligerents within its jurisdiction, and also a responsibility to treat belligerents impartially. Customary international law, treaties, and relevant domestic legislation confirm such rights and responsibilities (americanforeignrelations.com).

It was at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 that states first acknowledged the right to be neutral and make neutrality a strategic policy of a state. The laws concerning the rights and duties of neutrality are contained, for the most part, in the Paris Declaration of 1856. In 1899 and 1907 the Hague Conventions were signed, codifying the rules of neutrality.

The 19th century saw a number of individual states adopting this principle of foreign policy, and now they are known as countries of classical neutrality: Switzerland, Belgium and Luxembourg. With the spread of bloodshed and destructive wars in the world, more and more people manifested their desire to stay on the sidelines of armed conflicts. Consequently, more states have declared themselves neutral; these include some Northern European countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark) and certain countries of the Middle East and Latin America. Since then, neutrality has been legally defined on an ad hoc basis in multilateral and bilateral agreements between individual states.

Some, however, regarded neutrality as a self-interested, amoral and unrealistic stance, a desire of small and powerless states to guarantee security for their peoples. Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the USA, once wrote, “I fear that fair neutrality will
prove a disagreeable pill for our friends, though necessary to keep us out of the calamities of war” (Tucker, 1837:423).

Generally, when we speak of neutrality in modern politics, we should distinguish between the law of neutrality and the policy of neutrality. According to the definitions given by the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of the Swiss Confederation, while the law of neutrality stems from international customary law and contains provisions that apply to a neutral state as well as the belligerents in the event of an international armed conflict, a policy of neutrality, on the other hand, embodies all the measures that a neutral state takes for safeguarding the effectiveness and credibility of its neutrality.

The Federal Department of Foreign Affairs describes Swiss neutrality in the following terms: “Permanent neutrality is a principle of Swiss foreign policy. It serves to preserve Switzerland’s independence and the invulnerability of its national territory. In parallel, Switzerland undertakes not to take part in wars between other states”. 3

2.4. Neutrality in humanitarian affairs

The term “humanitarian” often goes hand in hand with the term “neutral” in the vocabulary of many international organisations. To illustrate this, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is well known as a humanitarian, neutral, impartial and independent organisation. According to the Preamble to its Statutes, neutrality is one of the seven Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (which are humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality). It is also the legal status this institution enjoys because states have endowed it with the component parts of a “neutral state” status. It allows it to operate in countries at war as a neutral intermediary and provider of humanitarian assistance.

As Harroff-Tavel (2003) points out: “to the ICRC, neutrality does not imply aloofness, but compassion for war victims, in the etymological sense of “suffering with”, or being by their side. Nor does neutrality imply coldness or lack of feeling. It is precisely because the feelings we have towards the suffering of those we seek to assist are not “neutral” that

3 From www.eda.admin.ch
we must adhere to political, religious and ideological neutrality – for that is what enables us to gain access to them.\textsuperscript{4}

The neutrality applicable to relief operations for victims of armed conflicts does not seem to exist as a legal concept. Nevertheless, it is mentioned in a number of United Nations General Assembly resolutions on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian aid provided by the United Nations, which generally contain the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality (Plattner, 1996:161-179).

\textbf{2.5. Neutrality in translation}

The question of the role of translators in a translation process and of a translator’s influence on the text they are translating has been at the center of attention and controversy for a long time. Buzadzhi (2009) writes that in translation studies in Russia the notion of transparency is very often preferable to that of neutrality. Not all authors think that the translator is or should be a kind of “transparent glass” (Buzadzhi, 2009:31). On the contrary, a translator’s personal experience, opinions and feelings represent an essential element of an effective translated text (Buzadzhi, 2009). Moreover, the fact that a translator is choosing one version from a multitude of versions, and the fact that different translators will translate the same long text in a different manner, confirms that a translator’s personality would always be reflected in the translation. Consequently, in translation it is more a question of the degree of intervention of the translator in the original text than a question of the absence of any intervention. And there is, of course, the question of authorship. Who has really written this text: the writer (in a foreign language), or a translator who translated it into the target language? Ideally, the text is to be translated in such a way that the translation does not eclipse the original text. For example, in Russia, a translator’s name is put in small print and almost never known by the public. A truly transparent translator never aspires to be a co-author (Buzadzhi, 2009). We should add that this is not the case for translation of poetry: in this case, the name of the translator is always clearly visible, translators are often considered as co-authors, and different translations are always compared.

\textsuperscript{4} www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf
In conclusion we can say that in light of the many elements involved in the definition of neutrality, this concept can be regarded as a complicated and multi-dimensional one. There is no one-size-fits-all definition of neutrality. This notion has been appropriated in such different spheres as politics, psychoanalysis, anthropology and the natural sciences and has consequently been categorized correspondingly although the common idea of neutral as not taking sides and not intervening prevails. For instance, in psychoanalysis it was interesting to notice the behavior of a neutral person who must not let his/her religious, moral, and social values interfere with the work nor give any advice or recommendation to the client. We deem this principle to be applicable to interpreters’ conduct too. When talking about neutrality in politics we underlined the need to avoid involvement in an armed conflict between other states, remain at peace, and treat belligerents impartially.

All these fields are rather remote from interpreting (with the possible exception of translation). Consequently, the different definitions of neutrality discussed above cannot be directly transposed to the field of interpreting. However, there is one domain where the notion of neutrality is introduced in terms similar to the ones used in the field of interpreting. This is the field of mediation. Interpreters, like mediators, are expected to be uninvolved in the parties’ internal conflict and treat them equally. In the next chapter we discuss the field of mediation and the notion of neutrality as it discussed in this field.

3. Defining Mediation

It is important to have a closer look at mediation as, first of all, the issue of neutrality is often discussed with regard to mediators and, secondly, there is a (recent) tendency to regard interpretation as a process similar to mediation. “It seems to be a deeply rooted, if largely unspecified assumption among those working in the field of translation (interpreting) that what they do is a form of “mediation” (Pöchhacker, 2008). If we look at studies on interpreting from the last twenty years, we can see that there is a trend among the representatives of the “liberal arts community” (Moser–Mercer, 2004, aiic.net) to view social aspects of interpreting as a triadic interaction, raising questions as to the actual role of the interpreter. In fact, at the beginning of her book, Angelelli asks: “Why is it that interpreters, powerful individuals who have occupied center stage since
the origins of cross-cultural communication, have traditionally been portrayed (and even more importantly, have allowed themselves to be portrayed) as mere language conduits, invisible parties in the communicative event, deprived of agency, yet capable of performing complex linguistic and information-processing tasks?” (2004:1). Wadensjö (1998) makes a distinction between “talk as text” and “talk as activity”. She analyzes “the interpreter-mediated encounter” as part of “social, cultural and subcultural ‘contexts’, stating that “the translating and coordinating aspects are simultaneously present, and one does not exclude the other” (1998:105). Pöchhacker writes: “Since an interpreter’s actions have a much more immediate effect on the progress and outcome of interaction, it has become increasingly common to construe the interpreter’s mediation activity as one of “moderating” or “managing” the interaction to guide it toward a felicitous outcome” (2008:13). There are clearly attempts to relate interpreting to mediation and, consequently, the work of interpreters to the work of mediators, especially in the context of community interpreting where there is an urgent need to determine the actual role of interpreters working in the field. In the cases of medical interviews, legal interpreting and court interpreting, their role can very often extend far beyond mere linguistic mediation.

At first glance, it is unclear whether the status of an interpreter as a neutral person could be reconciled with his/her role as a mediator. A possible contradiction between neutrality and mediation could be most clearly illustrated if the definition of neutrality used in the natural sciences is considered. As it is mentioned above, the precise definition of neutral with respect to a certain type of interaction in physics is not taking part in the interaction. It is not clear whether a body which is supposed to work as a mediator in an interaction could avoid taking part in this interaction.

3.1. **What is mediation?**

Mediation as a form of conflict management has existed since time immemorial. One of the earliest recorded mediations occurred more than four thousand years ago in Mesopotamia. A Sumerian ruler helped avert a war and develop an agreement in a dispute over land.

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5 A Sumerian ruler helped avert a war and develop an agreement in a dispute over land.
litigation, police interventions, family disputes and divorce, public disputes, international conflicts, environmental planning and decision making in organizations. The field of research on mediation is multidisciplinary, with contributions being made by psychologists, economists, political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, and scholars in the field of communications, industrial relations, law, and organizational behavior (Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992).

If we were to adopt the simplistic notion of mediation, one could say that any interaction that is not directly face-to-face and involves a third party in the middle counts as mediation. (One possible exception is a private conversation between three or more people over the telephone). “Every person lives in a world of social encounters, involving him either in face-to-face or mediated contact with other participants” (Goffman, 1967:5). The lexical definition in the Oxford Dictionary says that: “to mediate” means either “to intervene in a dispute to bring about an agreement or reconciliation” or “to be a medium for (a process or effort)” (2002:885). The notion of mediation does not seem to be complex if we reduce it to the physical position of being in-between. However, if we analyze mediation as interaction in a particular context with concrete parties and issues to discuss, finding a straightforward definition of mediation will be difficult. Many empirical and theoretical aspects need to be considered, such as the context of a given interaction, the degree of participation of a mediator, the balance of power between the parties, norms and perceptions, etc. Mediation is a part of interaction and as such cannot be defined in strictly theoretical terms and then simply applied to any situation involving the interaction of three or more parties. It is no wonder that for many decades scholars had difficulty finding a systematic approach to studying mediation. In fact, Bercovitch (1999) stated that for a long time the study of mediation was characterized by the lack of information on the subject. Traditionally, the profession as well as the process of mediation have been surrounded by mystery. For scholars there seemed to be no patterns or strategies that could be discerned in different mediated situations. This led to the “proliferation of descriptive cases of mediation in which the techniques used and the outcome achieved were invariably the product of a unique set of personal attributes of the mediator” (Bercovitch, 1997:404). Gulliver seems to agree with such a view: “[…] in Western societies there has been a good deal of resistance to the possibility of analyzing
and understanding the nature of mediation. Its practitioners in particular seem to have wanted to sustain an intuitive mystique about it” (1979:211).

Only during the past two decades has it become accepted that mediation can be systematically analyzed with the help of the theory and practical experience derived from concrete mediated encounters. Mediation happens in different settings and situations with the help of professional or sometimes voluntary mediators. There are two main types of definition: prescriptive and descriptive. Prescriptive definitions define the process as it should be ideally (create new options, consider alternatives, etc.) and descriptive definitions define the process in terms of what actually happens in practice (power imbalances, manipulation, etc.) (Bercovitch, 1999). There are definitions that emphasize the mediator’s most important objective, i.e. facilitating a resolution of the conflict and helping the parties to find a mutually acceptable solution. There are definitions that underline the nonbinding nature of mediation (as compared to arbitration). There are definitions emphasizing the importance of mediators’ attributes such as impartiality, neutrality and absence of bias. There are also definitions that concentrate more on a role of a mediator.

“Mediation is a process in which a third-party neutral assists in resolving a dispute between two or more other parties. It is a non-adversarial approach to conflict resolution. The role of the mediator is to facilitate communication between the parties, assist them in focusing on the real issues of the dispute, and generate options that meet the interests or needs of all relevant parties in an effort to resolve the conflict” (Honeyman & Yawanarajah, para.1, 2003).

“Mediation is a process in which a third party (usually neutral and unbiased) facilitates a negotiated consensual agreement among parties, without rendering a formal decision”.  

“Mediation is an informal dispute settlement process run by a trained third party, called a mediator. Mediation is intended to bring two parties together to clear up misunderstandings, find out concerns, and reach a resolution”.

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6 International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, p.9507
7 http://www.biztaxlaw.about.com
The three abovementioned definitions are descriptive ones. We can see the reference to the role of a mediator as a person who is neutral, unbiased and trained (in the third case) and who facilitates communication between the parties. The following definition is more extensive and detailed and mentions the limits of power of mediators.

“Mediators are people—official or unofficial—who get involved in a dispute in order to help the parties resolve it. Unlike arbitrators or judges, mediators have no power to define or enforce an agreement, but they can help the parties to voluntarily reach agreement by helping them with the negotiation process. Heads of state or their envoys often act as official mediators in international conflicts; an ombudsman may do so at the organization level. Informal intermediaries—sometimes called Track II diplomats—do the same at the international level, and, co-workers, friends, or family members can act as informal intermediaries in workplace, family, or neighborhood conflicts” (Burgess, para.1, 2004).

In the following definition mediation is defined as one of the functions of the Secretary General of the UN. It emphasizes that mediation efforts are not coercive.

“In the United Nations, the act of mediation describes the political skills utilized in efforts carried out by the United Nations Secretary-General or his representatives, through the exercise of the Secretary General’s “Good Offices”, without the use of force and in keeping with the principles of the UN Charter. The United Nations mediator engages in a process as a third party, when those in conflict either seek or accept the assistance of the United Nations with the aim to prevent, manage or resolve a conflict” (Honeyman & Yawanarajah, para.4, 2003).

The definitions of mediation are plenty. It is quite useful to make a summary of definitions in order to understand which attributes are the most frequent and relevant. In an attempt to define the main attributes of mediation, we believe that we can rely on the analysis of the various definitions of mediation proposed by Bercovitch (1999), who derives the following features and characteristics of mediation:

1. Mediation is a decision-making and conflict management process.
2. It is activated when a conflict cannot be resolved by the parties only, and it involves an extension and continuation of the parties’ own conflict management efforts.
3. Mediation involves the intervention in a conflict of an acceptable third party—the mediator—who is there to assist the disputants with their decision-making. Mediation is essentially negotiations with the involvement of an additional actor.
4. Mediation is a non-coercive, nonviolent, and ultimately nonbinding form of reaching decisions. Mediators have no authority to force the parties to resolve their differences.

5. Mediators enter a conflict in order to resolve it, affect, change, modify, or influence it.

6. Mediators bring with them, consciously or otherwise, ideas, knowledge, resources, and interests of their own.

7. Mediators operate on a temporary basis only. There is no permanent machinery for mediation; it is activated and terminated when required (Bercovitch, 1999:405).

In Bercovitch’s view the abovementioned attributes include all the key characteristics of the mediation process.

### 3.2 Types of mediation: problem–solving mediation VS transformative mediation

Based on the abovementioned definitions we can say that a mediator cannot force an outcome and a mediated outcome is never binding. Mediation does not necessarily lead to the resolution of a dispute. The mediator is a facilitator of communication. In situations where the parties cannot negotiate between each other there is a need for a third neutral party to promote communication; otherwise, communication will stop. When the negotiation process is stymied a mediator steps in and with the help of strategies or through mere mediating talent helps create a more productive discussion than the parties could have had on their own. Mediators may help the parties determine facts, clarify their positions and generate new ideas. Often, though not always, mediators have a lot of background knowledge of the issues and type of dispute involved. Not all mediators are professionals, and they come from many different backgrounds. Taking into account the fact that mediators are people with different degrees of experience in the field, different levels of competence and a different background it stands to reason that different mediators will mediate differently. Nevertheless mediation usually falls into two categories: problem-solving mediation or transformative mediation.
If a mediator uses a problem-solving or settlement-oriented approach at the outset, he/she sees a conflict as a problem that must be solved. The mediator frames the conflict with a focus on the needs or interests that cannot be reconciled by the parties. In the course of the mediation process he/she will do all he/she can to reconcile diverging interests and to find an acceptable agreement; in other words, he/she seeks a win-win situation.

“[…] mediators working within this framework will assess the conflict between two parties and assist them in defining their differences in terms of a problem. If a conflict is set up as a “problem”, then a solution to that problem logically exists. Through the process of reframing the parties’ positions, the mediator helps parties develop a common definition of the problem” (Spangler, 2003)

Transformative mediation is a relatively new concept although its principles have been used for a long time. According to Spangler (2003) it was Bush and Folger (1994) who coined the term. Instead of trying to resolve a conflict and seek an immediate agreement (like in problem-solving mediation), transformative mediation is rather about changing or transforming the parties to the conflict in a profound way. The transformation is achieved through empowerment and recognition. According to Bush and Folger, empowerment in this context means “increasing the skills of both sides to make better decisions for themselves” (Spangler, 2003). Through empowerment, the parties are able to state their goals, needs and resources. Recognition means enabling the parties to understand each other’s views and understand why they need to find a solution. It means acknowledging the adversary’s legitimate concerns. The goal of transformative mediation is to empower the parties so that they themselves handle the situation. The mediator’s role becomes secondary, as the parties themselves are responsible for the outcome. Empowerment and recognition might lead the parties to a mutual agreement and a solution even though that is merely a secondary goal, unlike in problem-solving mediation, where reaching a settlement is the sole and primary goal.

Baraldi (2009) defines transformative mediation in a very similar way but emphasizes that conflict can be regarded not only as a problem that should be resolved but as a chance to improve relations between the parties. This author suggests that changes are normally instigated as a consequence of conflicts that reveal participants’ problems and
difficulties. Conflicts are generally viewed as negative and destructive types of action but they can also open up new possibilities for communication, helping social systems to change and renew themselves (Baraldi, 2009). Mediation is supposed to promote this change. Transformative mediation “promotes the participants’ empowerment in defining issues and autonomously deciding about them, and mutual recognition of their points of view” (Baraldi, 2009:122).

3.3. Behavior and strategies of the mediator

Mediation is a reasonably effective method of conflict management. However, if mediators’ decisions are not formally binding how do they manage to move the mediation process forward? Do they have any particular strategies and tactics? “With so many actors capable of initiating and conducting mediation, it is not easy to make sense of the bewildering range of mediation behavior. This is why we often think of the broad categories of mediation roles, mediation strategies, and mediation tactics” (Bercovitch, 1999:408) and of “mediator behavior” (Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992:563). Mediators are expected to intervene in negotiations in order to clarify, explain and suggest solutions. But what is the degree of their intervention in a mediation process? We have already seen that depending on the mediation approach, the mediator’s role can be more or less primary/secondary or active/passive. A problem-solving mediator can sometimes provide a solution and then try to sell it to the parties. In a transformative mediation mediators present a mediation process as a forum where their role is to accompany the parties (transforming their relationships rather than suggesting solutions). But in reality mediation is much more complex and many theorists say that “the complexity of international and intercultural disputes calls for a greater variety of mediator roles” (Maiese, 2005).

According to Bercovitch (1999) there can be different approaches to the classification of the mediator’s roles: formal versus informal roles, advisory versus directive, or invited versus non-invited roles. Bercovitch enumerates such roles as catalyst, educator, agent of reality, and scapegoat. Bercovitch, on the other hand, believes that it does not make sense to make a list of roles mediators can play and that “it is unwise to assume that mediators carry out only one role throughout their mediation. The reality of mediation is that of a
dynamic situation where mediators may enact a number of roles in the course of their mediation” (Bercovitch, 1999:408). Consequently, the notion of strategy might offer a more useful approach for identifying of mediator behavior and tactics. The three basic strategies proposed by Bercovitch (1999) are:

1. Communication–facilitation strategies:
   - Make contact with the parties;
   - gain the trust and confidence of the parties;
   - arrange for interactions between the parties;
   - identify issues and interests;
   - help to reframe issues;
   - clarify situation and define issues;
   - provide confidence and reassurance;
   - avoid taking sides;
   - guide communications;
   - develop a framework for understanding;
   - listen actively;
   - encourage meaningful communication;
   - offer positive evaluations;
   - summarize positions and interests;
   - allow the interests of all parties to be discussed.

2. Formulation strategies:
   - Choose site for meetings;
   - decide which parties should be involved;
   - control pace and formality of meetings;
   - control physical environment including seating;
   - establish protocol;
   - suggest procedures for speaking, intermissions and caucusing;
   - highlight common interests;
   - reduce tensions;
   - control timing;
• deal with simple issues first;
• structure agenda;
• keep parties at the table;
• help parties save face;
• keep process focused on issues.

3. Directive strategies:
• Change parties’ expectations;
• take responsibility for concessions;
• identify settlement range;
• make substantive suggestions and proposals;
• make parties aware of the costs of non-agreement;
• impose deadlines;
• supply and filter information;
• suggest concessions parties can make;
• help negotiators to undo a commitment or “save face”;
• help to construct settlement formulae;
• reward party concessions;
• help devise a framework for acceptable outcome;
• change expectations;
• press the parties to show flexibility;
• promise resources or threaten withdrawal.

Such a list of strategies and tactics shows what mediators actually do when they intervene into a conflict (Bercovitch, 1999). As a closing remark on strategies Bercovitch says: “to be effective, however, mediation strategies must reflect the reality of the conflict, the nature of the parties involved, and the resources of the mediator. To that extent mediation is a truly reciprocal activity” (Bercovitch, 1999:409).

Gulliver (1979) tried to define the status of the mediator, whom he believes to be a party to negotiations, i.e. a negotiator. “In general terms, a mediator, whatever his status and strategy facilitates and to some degree influences, even controls, the exchange of information, the concomitant learning, and the consequent readjustment of perception,
preferences and choices” (Gulliver, 1979:219). Gulliver seems to support the view that concrete situations are complex so it is difficult to establish clear-cut categories in the classification of mediators. He prefers to combine the notion of the role and that of the strategy and to speak of a range of “strategic roles of mediators” (Gulliver, 1979:221). For Gulliver it is more relevant to describe the mediator’s role on a continuum representing the strength of intervention. He tries to define different categories of mediators, although he acknowledges that the boundaries are not clear-cut. Gulliver’s roles continuum goes from “virtually passive” role, to “chairman”, to “enunciator”, to “prompter”, to “leader”.

A passive mediator can, by his/her mere presence, encourage positive communication (in his/her presence parties are constrained to observe minimal courtesy, reduce insulting rhetoric and listen more attentively). The mediator -“chairman” (next along the spectrum) tries to keep order and direct the procedure. A mediator can make procedural suggestions: he/she can suggest that the agenda be revised, or offer to organize separate meetings with each party, for instance. He/she may arrange the time and place of further meetings, call for breaks, curb interruptions, irrelevances, etc. The next strategic role is that of “enunciator” (Gulliver, 1979). The mediator-enunciator can clarify or remind parties of the rules and norms relevant to issues in negotiations. “The choice of norms, the particular juncture when they are expressed, the way this is done and kind of emphasis given must—often quite purposefully—affect the learning process. It may be done impartially or at least with that intent, or it may be deliberately partial and manipulative” (Gulliver, 1979:223). In the role of a “prompter”, the mediator makes an attempt to clarify and interpret information and interpretation and to encourage coordination between the parties. The mediator may ask to repeat the argument or ask for more information to support an argument. He/she might restate an argument by enumerating its main points to elicit a reaction from the parties. Typical prompter’s statements are: “Did I understand you correctly that you say X and Y and that your position is X and Y?” (Gulliver, 1979:224). Finally, in the even more active role of “leader”, the mediator directly or indirectly injects his/her own opinions and recommendations. This kind of mediator might go as far as to force discussion of issues which the parties are trying to avoid.
By way of a closing remark, Gulliver states that “it should be emphasized that these different strategies are sometimes less easily and clearly distinguishable in practice than analytical exposition might suggest” (Gulliver, 1979:227).

Carnevale and Pruitt (1992) use a completely different approach. They talk not about the mediator’s role and mediation strategies but about mediator behavior on the basis of four distinctive components of mediation:

1. the relationship between the mediator and the disputants;
2. the relationship between the parties during mediation;
3. the issues;
4. the individuals (or groups) on each side of the dispute and their motivation to reach agreement (Carnevale and Pruitt, 1992).

In terms of the mediator-disputant relationship, mediator behavior is aimed at establishing trust in the mediator so that the disputants accept the mediation process better. Trust in the mediator is an important predictor of settlement (Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992).

Regarding the second component, namely the relationship between the parties during mediation, mediator behavior is aimed at controlling communication and helping the parties to understand each other’s positions. The technique mediators can use to this end is a caucus.\(^8\)

Where the third point is concerned, the mediator can help identify the issues, uncover underlying interests and concerns, set the agenda, sequence and prioritize issues, make suggestions for possible settlement, and so on.

The last component is the parties themselves. Some mediators’ behaviors are designed to reduce a party’s reluctance to make concessions, helping them save face when making concessions, or to help them to resolve internal disagreements. Mediators can add incentives (or threats or negative sanctions) to increase a party’s motivation for an agreement.

\(^8\) I.e. a separate meeting with each of the parties
Carnevale & Pruitt conclude that: “These four categories of action are by no means mutually exclusive. Several of them can occur at the same time” (1992:564).

3.4 Neutrality in mediation

3.4.1. Definition

We saw in Chapter 2 that neutrality is a complicated and multidimensional concept with different meanings in different domains. Neutrality is also a subject of study in the field of mediation. As a matter of fact, we find that the definitions of neutrality found in works on mediation are most relevant to the field of interpreting.

For mediators, the term ‘neutral’ is fundamental for their professional activity and represents a conceptual framework for their practice. It receives much attention and is often mentioned in the literature on mediation: it is one of the basic notions which inform the standards of a great number of mediation organizations. “As mediators, we seem to be drawn to the word “neutral” as a descriptive term for what we do and as a conceptual frame for our professional role. The terms “neutral” and “neutrality” are peppered throughout our discussion of mediation in much of the literature, and in the standards of practice of many, if not most, professional mediation organisations, in court rules, and even in enabling legislation” (Benjamin, 2001).9 Section 9(g) of the Uniform Mediation Act states: “A mediator must be impartial unless the parties agree otherwise”.10 It is a necessary element of proper conduct for mediators, helping them to acquire credibility, trust, and acknowledgement of professionalism. Carnevale & Pruitt (1992) write that the traditional view of mediation is that, to be effective, the mediator must be impartial and have no stake in the outcome of negotiation. They write that one should not doubt that neutrality often contributes to successful mediation. Maiese (2005) points out that “the commonly accepted “outsider-neutral” conceptualization of mediation suggests that the mediator should come from outside the conflict situation and have no commitment or connection to either side. Many believe that the presence of a neutral third party serves to

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9 http://www.mediate.com
10 Section 9. Mediator’s disclosure of conflicts of interest; Background. Uniform Mediation Act (last revised and amended in 2003). Drafted by National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws (August 10-17, 2001)
legitimize the mediation process”. Maiese (2005) also states that neutrality has many and varied meanings and several different understandings of neutrality are employed in the context of mediation. Benjamin (2001) agrees with such a view. He writes: “Neutralilty has many and varied meanings, and therein lies the difficulty. It refers both to the role of the mediator and how he/she will supposedly act. In the classic sense of the term “neutral”, the mediator:

1. will not intervene in the substance of the dispute;
2. is indifferent to the welfare of the clients;
3. has no previous or present relationship with the parties outside of the mediation;
4. will not attempt to alter perceived power balance variances;
5. is disinterested in the outcome;
6. is unconcerned with the impact of the settlement on unrepresented parties.”

Maiese (2005) writes that being neutral in mediation means:
1. Not being affiliated with either side;
2. Being mutually acceptable to both parties;
3. Disinterested;
4. Having no personal interest;
5. Approaching the proceedings with an open mind.

**3.4.2 Theory vs practice**

The notion of neutrality in mediation is constantly challenged by both scholars and practitioners. Brookmire and Sistrunk (1980), Smith (1985), Touval (1975) and Touval and Zartman (1985) argue that a biased mediator is sometimes the only available option (Carnevale &Pruitt, 1992). Gulliver believes that a truly impartial mediator is a rare case. He regrets that very often mediators are depicted either as being completely neutral, which is “probably a myth in practice” (Gulliver, 1979:212) or, on the contrary, as an adjudicator dictating solutions to the parties. In his view, meanwhile, it would be useful to look at a mediator’s role as a continuum going from less involved to more involved. Furthermore, Gulliver states that even if a mediator is impartial towards the parties he/she can be quite partial toward his/her own interests, such as strengthening his/her reputation.
and promoting his/her services. He takes the question of the impartial/partial mediator as a starting point in his analysis of the mediator’s roles and strategies. “The status of the mediator can initially be examined according to whether he is supposedly disinterested or acknowledged to be an interested party” (Gulliver, 1979:214). Disinterested (or impartial) mediators are those who are not directly related to either disputing party and whose own interests are not directly affected by the dispute or by possible outcomes (for example, the mediator can be a professional agent of an established board of mediation or conciliation or an expert who brings special knowledge to the negotiations: a lawyer, a technical specialist, etc.) Interested (or partial) mediators are those who are concerned about the resolution of the dispute and with the disputants themselves (for example, a country that might be affected if its neighbors were to go to war). The mediator’s partiality can be known to the parties. The disputing parties can still accept such a mediator, especially if negotiation process is stymied and such a mediator is better than no one at all. A mediator can be partial to one party or even be connected in some way to both parties (for example, a political or economic ally of both). The rationale behind this form of mediation is that the mediator connected to both has divided loyalties and obligations so he/she may be acceptable to both. Such a mediator wishes to maintain his/her advantageous relations with both (which is difficult if they are in conflict) and wishes to prevent a situation in which an outcome might damage his/her own interests. Gulliver concludes that “it is more correct to assume that the supposedly impartial mediator is probably seeking some degree of advantage beyond that of the disputing parties, and we need to take account of this in seeking to understand the significance of mediation and triadic interaction” and that “this means that we have to consider three—not merely two—sets of interests, preferences, learning, strategies, and action choices in a triadic structure” (Gulliver, 1979:218).

Benjamin (2001) writes that “most experienced mediators learn very early that the ideal of remaining neutral is quickly battered when faced with the realities of effectively managing conflicts”. Furthermore, he states that there are some practical risks with mediators describing themselves as neutral. A significant number of grievances against mediators are based on the claim that the mediator did not appear to act, or in fact act, in a neutral manner. This can lead to a situation in which the mediator may believe that
he/she is clear as to the meaning of neutrality while the parties are not nearly as clear. According to Benjamin (2001), “the term “neutral” is attractive because it is anchored in our techno-rational belief system and derived from methods of inquiry. In that sense it is culturally linked—we want to think that if mediator is neutral and disengaged, he or she will be more objective, rational, dispassionate and unbiased”.

Gulliver supports the view that the myth of the mediator’s neutrality is a product of western civilization, arguing that “the strong, Western, cultural stereotype and moral notion of the purely impartial mediator is neither invariably correct in practice in our society nor valid cross-culturally” (Gulliver, 1979:217).

Other authors such as Field (2002) believe that there is a problem with neutrality defined in theoretical terms and with neutrality in mediators’ practice, and that theoretical musings about the issue of neutrality have not influenced the practice of mediation as mediators continue to believe that they can be absolutely neutral. She also thinks that a probable solution to the problem might be a distinction between the notions of “neutrality” and “impartiality”. Thus, neutrality should be regarded as a lack of interest in the outcome, whereas impartiality is defined as objectivity, even-handedness and fairness towards the parties. While a mediator must always be objective and fair, he/she cannot always be neutral. Field writes that it is essential given the reality of the mediation process to see neutrality as a “multi-dimensional concept, with not all dimensions present in all instances” (Field, 2002).

4. Neutrality in conference interpreting

Having considered various definitions of mediation and the concept of neutrality, we can now move on to the main subject of our study. We argue that, as is often the case in the field of mediation, there might be a gap between the theoretical assumptions about interpreters’ neutrality and its practical realization in the context of conference interpreting, especially in the case of consecutive and whispering interpreting, where the interpreter is physically located between the parties of a negotiation. In our view, this gap is directly related to the element of mediation which is present in the work of an interpreter.

http://www.mediate.com
interpreter. Since the interpreter’s degree of involvement in the mediation process between the parties might depend on a number of factors, including the mode of interpreting, this mediation aspect of the interpreter’s work might be more or less strongly present in particular situations. In this chapter we will analyze and compare consecutive and simultaneous modes of conference interpreting and try to clarify to what extent the interpreter might or might not remain neutral in both cases. We will then attempt to answer the question of whether the interpreting mode used influences the interpreter’s neutrality.

4.1 The mediation element in the work of interpreter

As was mentioned above, a number of recent studies reveal an emerging interest in the elements of mediation present in the work of interpreters. It is clear that the interpreter takes part in the interaction between the parties participating in a conference: without an interpreter the interaction would just not be possible, since the parties would not be able to understand each other. It is also clear that the interpreter is mediating (i.e. transmitting) the interaction, in terms of the definition of mediation used in the natural sciences. It is, however, not clear from the outset whether the work of an interpreter involves the aspects of the work of a mediator as it is understood in the conflict management sense as described in detail in the previous chapter. If this is the case, it is not clear whether the mediator’s role of an interpreter provides a threat to the interpreter’s neutrality.

If we presume that interpreting can be related to mediation (on the basis of the physical presence and the position of an interpreter between two parties) we can suggest that an interpreter’s role can be related to that of a mediator in certain contexts. Interpreters might be regarded as mediators because they might influence the interaction in which they are involved. If interpreters do influence the interaction, they cannot be considered to be completely neutral in the sense of being impartial, not interested in the outcome of the meeting and not taking sides. It is interesting (though quite a challenge) for us in this discussion to focus mainly on conference interpreting. There is only scant information about the issue of neutrality in conference interpreting. Why does a large part of what we know about the problem of neutrality in interpreting come mainly from the field of community interpreting or interpreting in conflict zones? Even if we assume that
conference interpreters are the “most neutral” kind of interpreters, it would be interesting to consider whether conference interpreters’ neutrality remains unchallenged in all interpreting modes (simultaneous, consecutive, whispering). We will attempt to argue that, like in the field of mediation, where the role of mediators varies across a continuum, there might be a continuum for different levels of neutrality on the part of conference interpreters depending on the interpreting mode. This continuum of neutrality levels reflects the continuum of the levels of the presence of mediation aspects in the interpreter’s work. Before proceeding to analyze the various interpreting modes we will explore why the discussion of neutrality has taken place mainly in the field of community interpreting.

4.2 Conference interpreting and community interpreting

First of all, it is necessary to understand the difference between different working environments of interpreting. At first sight there is no apparent difference in the process of interpreting when applied to both fields. To interpret means to facilitate communication between parties that do not speak the same language, both in a conference and a community context. In both cases an interpreter translates the message from language X to language Y and sometimes back from language Y to language X. However, we will argue that conference and community interpreting differ significantly in several aspects. We believe that the most significant differences exist on four levels:

1. The setting of the interaction
2. The participants in the interaction
3. The level of training
4. The level of professionalization

We believe that these distinctions can predetermine a different understanding of the interpreters’ role and challenge their neutrality.

12 According to our teachers’ information, if an interpreter wants to work on a private market (i.e. in the context of small meetings held by private companies and in consecutive) it is desirable to have a B language. In a context of community interpreting we can assume that a B language will be also a plus. It is difficult to imagine that there would be two interpreters present at, for example, a medical interview, although this could be the case.
4.2.1 Setting

Community interpreting is performed in a social, medical or legal context. The meetings can take place in community centres, hospitals and surgeries, schools, various offices dealing with immigration matters, housing and social security, and police stations. The tenor of the meetings can range from very formal to very informal (as opposed to conference interpreting, where meetings are mostly very formal).

“Community interpreting enables people who are not fluent speakers of the official language(s) of the country to communicate with the providers of public services so as to facilitate full and equal access to legal, health, education, government, and social services” (Carr et al., 1995).

4.2.2 Participants

By participants we mean interpreters and their clients. It is important to stress that community interpreters work mainly with immigrants, refugees, migrant workers and their children. These people very often have no or very little command of the language of the country in which they live and represent an ethnic minority. Conversely, conference interpreters mostly interpret for conference delegates, diplomats, or professionals travelling abroad to conduct business. For many authors writing on the subject of community interpreting this difference is crucial for the definition of the interpreter’s role. The interaction between the interpreters and their clients is more significant in a community setting than in a conference setting. Some authors, such as Metzger (1999), Hale, (2008), refer to the power differential of the parties to a meeting. Others, including Wadensjö (1998), Angelelli (2004), and Pöchhacker (2008), stress, rather, the fact that the interpreter’s function goes beyond a linguistic one: “The community interpreter has a very different role and responsibilities from a commercial or conference interpreter. She is responsible for enabling professionals and clients, with very different backgrounds and perceptions and in an unequal relationship of power and knowledge, to communicate to their mutual satisfaction” (Shackman (1984), cited in Bowen (2000)). This definition of the role of a community interpreter reminds us of the function of a mediator in the
process of transformative mediation, which is “to enable parties” to promote the resolution of a conflict.

A useful summary of distinctions between the role of a community interpreter and that of a conference interpreter is given by Roberts:

- community interpreters primarily serve to ensure access to public services, and are therefore likely to work in institutional settings;
- they interpret more often dialogue-like interactions than speeches;
- they routinely interpret into and out of both or all of their working languages;
- the presence of the community interpreter is much more noticeable in the communication process than is that of the conference interpreter.

Community interpreters are often viewed as advocates or “cultural brokers” who go beyond the traditional neutral role of the interpreter (Roberts (1994) cited in Mikkelson, 2004).

4.2.3 Level of training

Community interpreters’ level of training may vary considerably. For example, in the context of a medical interview, a person interpreting for a migrant worker will not necessarily be an interpreter with a diploma in interpreting. It can be somebody working in the hospital who shares the migrant’s nationality, or a member of the migrant’s family. We believe that the rarity of a required languages can, among other reasons, force employers to accept any person knowing the rare language for the interpreting job. It is not possible for us to imagine such a situation in the context of conference interpreting. Even in a situation where a rare language is needed we believe that the employer (e.g. international organisations) will be looking, in the first instance, for a qualified and experienced interpreter. At the dawn of the interpreting profession interpreters could work without any formal training, and had to work as best as they could (for example, the interpreters at the Nuremberg trial). Today it is difficult to imagine a conference interpreter working in an international organisation without first having gained a university education and followed a postgraduate course in conference interpreting at an interpreting school. Reunbrouck (2001) does not fully agree with such a view:
“Unfortunately, this ideal career path (university diploma + postgraduate conference interpreting course) is still rather uncommon amongst interpreters. University graduates with a perfect command of several languages are rare and often sought out on the market even without an interpretation degree. Most common are those interpreters who have followed a 4 to 5 years course in interpreting and translating”. We should note that Reunbrock does not specify whether the interpreters without the postgraduate diploma in interpreting work a lot and whether they can be employed by international organisations.

In any case, the contrast between either dedicated postgraduate programs or four- to five-year courses in interpreting and translation on the one hand and a complete absence of training on the other, reveal a dramatic difference in the level of training of conference and community interpreters respectively.

4.2.4. Level of professionalization

Roberts\textsuperscript{13} asserts that community interpreting, though “the oldest form of interpreting in the world, has been the most neglected both by practising interpreters and by scholars”. Mikkelson (2004) writes that community interpreting follows “the typical pattern of a profession in its infancy”.\textsuperscript{14} She believes that practitioners of community interpreting must reach a consensus about their role and function, and must then educate their clients; formal training programmes should be instituted. Once the training programmes become established, professional associations should emerge to represent the interests of community interpreters and to enforce the code of ethics (Mikkelson, 2004). It is our belief that conference interpreting has already completed these stages. Compared to community interpreting, conference interpreting is a very well regulated field of activity, especially in developed countries. AIIC was created in 1953 almost immediately after the creation of the major international organizations, and ever since it has been at the forefront of establishing professional standards for the work of conference interpreters. There are also schools and Master’s degree programs that for many years have been teaching conference interpreting and inculcating the notions of professional standards.

\footnotesize \textsuperscript{13} cited in Mikkelson, 2004, aiic.net
\textsuperscript{14} in her analysis Mikkelson relies on J. Tseng’s model (phases) of professionalization
The first international conference on community interpreting was held only in 1995. It was organised by Critical Link, a network that began raising awareness about community interpreting as a profession in 1992. There is still no common understanding of the role of community interpreters. Many authors indicate, for example, the existence of a gap between the requirements of neutrality present in different codes of ethics of medical and court interpreters and actual practice. Hale writes: “The early literature on the role of the interpreter and on what interpreters were expected to do was largely based on personal opinions rather than on any empirical research. In an attempt to fill the gap, descriptive discourse analytical studies began to show the actual performance of real-life community interpreters. These studies demonstrated that many interpreters performed very differently from the prescriptions in the codes of ethics” (Hale, 2008:126).

4.3 Perceptions and norms regarding neutrality in conference interpreting

Over the course of the last twenty years research on interpreting using sociolinguistics as a basis has begun to question the role of an interpreter as a mere language conduit and has shed some light on the interpreter as a co-participant in the interpreted communicative event. As researchers have analyzed the interaction of the parties, the notion of the non-neutral interpreter has begun to emerge, especially in the work of Metzger, who writes about the myth of neutrality (her main object of study is the field of sign language interpreting) (Angelelli, 2004:48).

4.3.1 Perceptions of the interpreter’s role

It is interesting to observe that there is a general feeling among professional conference interpreters that they must be neutral even though in the AIIC Code of Ethics the issue of neutrality is not even mentioned. Neutrality seems literally to be taken for granted in conference interpreting. When preparing her Interpreter’s Interpersonal Role Inventory (IPRI), Angelelli (2004) tried to understand how interpreters perceive the role they play. The IPRI was designed for interpreters from all working environments of the interpreting field: conference, court, medical/community and over-the-telephone. The results of Angelelli’s studies have shown that, first of all, interpreters from conference, medical and court settings perceived their roles differently. Secondly, the respondents from the group
of conference interpreting perceived themselves as the least visible (although not all conference interpreters felt this way) in comparison to other groups. Moreover, conference interpreters viewed the question of self-identification (with the dominant or subordinate group which is relevant in a case of power differential between the parties to an interaction) as being inapplicable in their work. The same is true for the spirit of the comments which Angelelli received from this group of respondents concerning many questions in the survey which they believed did not apply to them (especially concerning the questions on cultural mediation). Many comments underscored a complete degree of neutrality on the part of the interpreter: “A conference interpreter has the duty to be completely neutral (alas, even against our preferences!)” (comment of a conference interpreter, member of AIIC, Canada)” (Angelelli, 2004:78) Another example: “Our work is serious, and we must be respectful no matter what. Of course, we have feelings—we are human—but we keep them to ourselves. We are not participants; we are channeling other people’s words and feelings and give our all to do so. (conference interpreter, member of AIIC, USA)” (Anglelli, 2004:79). In her conclusions on the comments of her respondents from the conference interpreting group, Angelelli writes: “these comments reflect the professional ideology that remains unchallenged and is shared between the professional associations and practitioners. […] Interpreters take neutrality for granted, seeing it as their duty. If their professional code of ethics states it, then no matter what research and theory in related fields may prove, interpreters will continue to abide by the rules of these professional associations.” (Angelelli, 2004:79).

We find comments along similar lines in the study of Torikai devoted to diplomatic interpreters in post-World War II Japan. Torikai (2009) reports that the five Japanese interpreters who are the main subject of his study share the opinion that interpreters take neutrality for granted, seeing it as their duty. Torikai attempted to understand how they came to feel that way. These five interpreters were pioneers of conference interpreting in Japan. Neither of them was comprehensively trained in interpreting, let alone in professional ethics. Two of them started to practice simultaneous interpreting in 1950 before the creation of AIIC, and they have never been members of AIIC (though they do know about it). Moreover, Torikai underlines (as we mentioned at the beginning of this section) that the Code of Professional Ethics of AIIC does not discuss an interpreter’s
role or the neutrality issue. It does, however, contain such notions as secrecy, professionalism, confidentiality, collegiality and integrity.

It is also worth noting that in his study Torikai mentions that neutrality as a category may not be relevant in certain cultures or countries. For example, for Chinese interpreters:

“the ultimate purpose of interpreting is more important than the ethics of neutrality or faithfulness, and for in-house staff interpreters in Japanese-Chinese, it is imperative to give advice on cultural or social matters to facilitate better the communication between the participants, if necessary, editing inappropriate statements to avoid conflicts, and the criteria for evaluating an interpreter is not based on linguistic competence or interpreting skills, but on the successful outcome of the negotiation” (Torikai, 2009:160).

This view of neutrality reminds us of the view of Gulliver (see Chapter 3) when talking about the impartiality of a mediator as a notion which is “not valid cross-culturally” (Gulliver, 1979:217).

4.3.2 Conference interpreters’ code of professional conduct

AIIC’s Code of Professional Ethics does not impose the requirement of neutrality on conference interpreters. In Article 1 of the Code we find the following statement: “This Code of Professional Ethics (hereinafter called the “Code”) lays down the standards of integrity, professionalism and confidentiality which all members of the Association shall be bound to respect in their work as conference interpreters” (Code of Professional Ethics, aicc.net). Key elements of conference interpreters’ ethics are: confidentiality, integrity and collegiality. Only in the article by Kremer, the President of AIIC, explaining the ethical obligations of a conference interpreter do we find a reference to “neutrality”. He writes that, on the one hand, an interpreter must be loyal to his/her temporary employer but: “Although the interpreter must maintain professional secrecy, he can work for competing companies, successively, for example, identifying first with one and then with the other without leaving himself open to accusations of partiality. Consequently, moral integrity, together with confidentiality, leads to neutrality” (Kremer, para.14, 1997). Consequently, neutrality is considered as an inevitable derivative of moral integrity and confidentiality. One cannot exist without the other.
Having considered the issue of how interpreters perceive their role we can identify a certain paradox: despite the absence of precise references to the necessity of being neutral and impartial in the Code of Professional Ethics of AIIC, neutrality is taken for granted by conference interpreters. Even at the beginning of simultaneous interpreting during the Nuremberg Trials the interpreters understood the importance of their neutrality. Peter Less, one of the interpreters at the Nuremberg Trial, observes: “It wasn’t easy. You were sitting in the same room with the people who probably killed your parents, but you could not let your feelings interfere with your job. You swore to interpret as faithfully as possible, to put the speaker’s idea into the listener’s head. So we did” (Gesse, 2005, aiic.net). In the case of the Nuremberg Trials, the usual court practice of taking an oath was used to guarantee the interpreters’ neutrality.

5. The conference interpreter’s neutrality in the consecutive and simultaneous modes

In this almost perfect climate of neutrality in conference interpreting (as perceived by professional interpreters), is there room for further speculation about the role and neutrality of a conference interpreter? We believe that, as in the field of mediation, there might be a discrepancy between theory and practice where the conference interpreter’s neutrality is concerned. In terms of the roles and strategies used by mediators, we can probably say that an interpreter will fit in a role of a passive mediator applying communication-facilitating strategies. An interpreter is expected to be neutral and impartial and, unlike mediators, it would be unthinkable for interpreters to be partial (openly or not). This must be valid for the consecutive and simultaneous modes alike.

5.1 Consecutive mode—definition

The consecutive interpreting process can be described (we use here a summary of many definitions we have read) as one in which the interpreter sits close to the speaker (for example, at the same table) and gives the speech in the target language as soon as the speaker has finished. The length of the speeches can vary, they can be divided into small parts or delivered in their entirety and in the majority of cases the interpreter takes notes.
In this mode interpreter reproduces the original message with greater clarity than was present in the original, as he/she analyses the speech and eliminates hesitation, unintentional repetition, and filler words.

5.2 Whispering mode—definition

It is difficult to define precisely whether whispering is a sub-category of consecutive or simultaneous interpreting. Whispering, also known as whispered interpreting, is the mode in which the interpreter sits next to the target-language audience (one or two people) and whispers the interpretation in their ear. It is considered by some authors as a variation of simultaneous interpreting (Herbert, 1952; Pöchhacker, 2004) since it is done while the speaker speaks. But due to the fact that the interpreter does not work in a faraway booth and is physically close to the delegates we can think that it falls into the sub-category of consecutive interpreting.

5.3 Simultaneous mode—definition

With simultaneous interpreting “the interpreters sit in a booth with a clear view of the meeting room, listen to the speaker through headphones and interpret the speech as it unfolds, i.e. simultaneously, into the other conference languages” (aiic.net). Besides a booth that meets the standards of acoustic isolation, dimensions, and air quality, simultaneous interpretation requires appropriate equipment such as headphones and a microphone for the interpreter and headsets for the delegates, as well as special equipment for sound amplification, transmission and recording. This type of interpreting requires high levels of concentration and interpreters will need to alternate every 20 to 30 minutes.

5.4 Neutrality criteria

In Chapter 2 we saw that it is difficult to give a universal definition of neutrality, neutrality is, rather, defined with respect to particular interactions. The most relevant definitions or attributes of neutrality are found in the domain of mediation. These attributes are directly transposable to the field of interpreting. Having analyzed different
definitions of the term “neutral” we suggest that a person (an interpreter in our case) is neutral when he/she:

1. does not identify himself/herself with any of the parties and is not taking sides;
2. is not influenced by his/her own beliefs, opinions and feelings;
3. has no prior knowledge of the dispute and/or the parties (we use this attribute as we take the neutrality definition used in mediation although we do admit that it would be quite difficult for an interpreter to have no prior knowledge of the dispute);
4. is indifferent to the outcome of the interaction

If we as interpreters want to achieve a maximum degree of neutrality, all the abovementioned criteria should be observed. We might presume then that as neutral interpreters we should not be connected in any way to the parties to interaction, we should not help or show empathy to any of the parties, we should not let our own beliefs and knowledge influence our work or our attitude to the parties, we should have no prior information as to the subject of the meeting and we should be completely disinterested in the result of the meeting. In short and ideally we should be a “non-person” (Goffman, 1990). “In many respects, the concept of “non-person” applies to the interpreter in face-to-face interaction. Interpreters play a kind of technical role and are counted as not fully present; there is an expectation that they will contribute nothing to the substance of the current conversation” (Wadensjo, 1998:67). Our analysis in the subsequent sub-sections is aimed to clarify whether this “ideal” concept of neutrality in conference interpreting corresponds to reality and to identify the main threats to this concept of neutrality.

5.5 Method of mode analysis

Based on our experience gained during training as conference interpreters at ETI we were able to identify a number of parameters which potentially influence an interpreter’s neutrality in all the modes of conference interpreting:

1. The interpreter’s physical location
2. The means of an interpreter’s intervention into the interaction

15 Goffman states that actors who play the role of ‘non-person’ are present during an encounter but in some respect do not take the role either of performer or of audience, nor do they pretend to be what they are not. A classic example of ‘non-person’ is the servant.
3. Time constraints

We have defined these parameters independently drawing upon the knowledge which we accumulated during three semesters of studies at ETI. This includes the literature read on the subject, practice during the General Consecutive, General and Technical Simultaneous classes, “dummy booth” practice at the UN, personal work experience and examples recounted by our teachers. We decided not to analyze “whispering” as a separate mode but rather included it in the category of consecutive interpreting.

Of our three parameters, the first—distance, or the interpreter’s physical presence in between the two parties or at the side of one of them—is in our view a determining parameter that can challenge an interpreter’s neutrality. The lack of any distance between the parties and an interpreter favors the establishment of a direct relationship between an interpreter and one of the parties. If an interpreter comes face-to-face with the parties to the interaction, the potential that he/she will be involved in the conversation is greater. Goffman (1990) writes that two people will always communicate in a different way in the presence of a third person—an intermediary. The organization of a situation is dependent on all parties involved in it and on how they relate to one another.

5.6 Neutrality in the consecutive interpreting mode: analysis

5.6.1 Physical location

In terms of the first parameter—an interpreter’s physical location—in the consecutive mode the interpreter’s presence in the room is obvious and the distance between the interpreter and the speaker and the interpreter and the audience is minimal. In the whispering mode an interpreter stays very close to the party for whom he/she is interpreting. Distance can be minimal because the consecutive mode is often used in such settings as:

- small bilateral meetings,
- round-table talks and negotiations
- press conferences
- ceremonial speeches (such as after dinner speeches), etc.
This kind of working environment brings the parties closer to each other.

In the case of consecutive interpreting, then, there is not just a voice coming through the headphones, but rather an interpreter in person. Absence of distance to the speakers and the audience (if there is an audience) allows the interpreter to have direct eye-contact with the participants and to observe their behavior and body language. Observing non-verbal vehicles of expression like body language helps a person in the middle to appreciate the nuances of the relations between the parties and power differentials that exist between them more efficiently than in the booth. If, for example, two parties meet to resolve a conflict, it can be difficult for an interpreter to avoid siding with one of them as the interpreter is directly involved in the negotiation process: he/she is expected to speak and his/her words conditions the words of others (and vice versa). Moreover, each party can understand the argument of the other party only from the explanations provided by the interpreter. The interpreter may feel empathy for or identify with one of the parties because, for example, he/she has the same view on the subject or shares the nationality of one of the parties, or because one of the parties shows the interpreter more respect than the other one, etc. It is even conceivable that the interpreter might adjust the way in which a phrase is rendered according to the non-verbal signals he/she receives from the party or parties for which he/she is interpreting.

5.6.2. Means of intervention

All the participants in the interaction organize and change it. Both the interpreter and the participants have a means of intervention in the process of communication. Besides addressing the other party directly, the participants can directly address the interpreter. For example, they can ask the interpreter to explain the term, an anecdote, a cultural reference, or to stop the interpreter at any moment or even correct an eventual mistake (a habit exhibited by S. Lavrov, the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs). Even if the interpreter is not expected to intervene in the substance of the conversation, he/she can still do so if this helps him/her to fulfill the main task of interpreting, i.e. facilitation of communication. Interpreters working in consecutive may:

- ask the participants to respect the time limit of 5-6 minutes
• ask participants not to speak quickly
• ask the participants to take turns to speak (rather than having everybody speak at the same time)

Although this list is not exhaustive, we believe that at the discourse level interpreters can:
• eliminate redundant elements of speech or alter or omit parts of the message
• ask for a question, term or figure to be repeated
• provide additional explanations of terms, anecdotes, proverbs or cultural references
• change the initial structure of sentences and reformulate them
• mitigate face-threatening acts: make offensive language sound more neutral and neutralize emotions
• correct mistakes made by the speaker

It is clear that a potential opportunity to intervene in the communication poses a potential threat to the “ideal” concept of the neutral “non-person” discussed above. On the one hand, we must admit that it is not clear to us whether an intervention of the procedural kind (asking for a figure or term to be repeated, insisting that a certain time limit of the speech be respected, or asking parties not to speak too quickly or to take turns to speak) may challenge the neutrality of an interpreter. This might help interpreters to ensure that the parties do not forget about their presence and respect their conditions of work. When interpreters eliminate the redundant elements of speech, reformulate or omit parts of the message or provide additional explanations we cannot say precisely whether they always do so for semantic, ethical or other purposes.

On the other hand, if interpreters were indifferent to the outcome of the interaction they would not have exercised their right to ask for clarification, or they would not have mitigated face threatening acts. To illustrate this point we could cite an anecdote recounted to us by a teacher at ETI. The teacher’s friend was interpreting for a famous Russian filmmaker during a meeting involving film-industry representatives. After an official dinner the filmmaker was to stand up and say a few words. For some reasons, however, (or perhaps under the influence of alcohol), instead of giving a speech, the speaker quoted a verse by a renowned Russian poet and finished the quotation with an expression containing strong language. The filmmaker then sat down. The interpreter
proceeded to say: “Dear friends, I'm so happy that we’re all here today”. The interpreter saved face on behalf of his client. We cannot say that he was neutral and indifferent to the outcome of the interaction. It is very probable that he sympathized with the speaker or identified with him. In our view, this example illustrates the fact that, being human, an interpreter feels a natural instinct to self-protect and avoid conflicts. Based on this instinct, he/she starts to work as a mediator. Besides, in the face of a potential conflict, he/she might cease to occupy a position precisely “in between” the parties and in this way begin to lose his/her neutrality.

5.6.3 Time constraints

In terms of time constraints, we can say that while working in the consecutive mode, interpreters may have enough time to establish a direct relationship with a speaker. Interpreters can meet a speaker before the meeting and ask him/her questions on the subject of his/her speech. An interpreter may work with a single client for more than one day (for example, in the case of long negotiations). In this case it would be difficult for the interpreter not to side with his/her client as the interpreter could have established a positive personal rapport with the client over the course of the period in question. If there is an established relationship with the client then the criteria involving “no prior knowledge of the parties” and “not siding with one of the parties” might not be respected.

5.7. Neutrality in the simultaneous interpreting mode of interpreting: analysis

Let us now turn our attention to the simultaneous mode of conference interpreting. There is a perception among conference interpreters working in the simultaneous mode that they do not interact with the clients and, consequently, that they are neutral and not at all concerned with neutrality: “they seem to feel that the booth shelters them from the three-party communicative process and that they are not actually an essential participant to this process” (Angelelli, 2004, p.80) Russian author Miram writes that: “simultaneous interpreting must create an illusion of its absence” (Miram, 1999:82). We might say that SI is the neutral mode par excellence. We need first, however, to carry out the same

16 From a private e-mail from A. Ponomarev, June 2010
analysis of the simultaneous interpreting mode as for the consecutive mode, using the parameters adopted above.

5.7.1 Physical location

In terms of interpreters’ physical location we can say that the very framework of SI predetermines a distance between interpreters and their clients and consequently reduces the potential for establishing any direct relationship between interpreters and their audience. Simultaneous interpreting is mostly used in big international conferences in the conference halls of international organizations with hundreds of delegates present. The interpreting may be done into many languages. There can be at least five–six booths with at least two interpreters per booth. The relationship between those who sit in the booths and those sitting in the conference rooms becomes formal. The responsibility for communication between the interpreters and a conference room is delegated to the official representatives of both sides: to the President of the conference (or Secretariat) on one side, and to the chief of the interpreters’ team on the other. Though quite formal, this kind of communication can, in our view, be considered as one-sided. For example, interpreters know who is speaking at any given point in time (they may have a list of speakers, and the President of the conference announces each speaker) but the delegates will never know the names of the interpreters who are interpreting for them. The speakers may know that they must not speak very quickly, but they will often ignore this requirement as they will not understand the consequences of their speed for the interpreters’ work (they will not see the interpreters’ reactions and will not hear the interpretation). Interpreters become an anonymous presence, and their voice is the only manifestation of it. The negative side of the interpreter’s neutrality and anonymity is underlined in the words of Wadi Kaiser, one of the pioneers of interpreting. He confirms that with the onset of SI, many changes have occurred in the relationship between interpreters and delegates. During the heyday of the consecutive mode, this relationship was more direct and personal: “Before, when we were working in consecutive, we were in the same room as the delegates. They would see us doing our work. They had respect for us and we also obviously had a lot of respect for them. We were treated as equals”. W. Kaiser continues by deploring that today “it is even poorly considered by some
colleagues when one speaks with the participants” as if two clans have emerged: the interpreters and the people they interpret for.\textsuperscript{17}

In such a formal environment and in the absence of direct contact with their clients it is more difficult, in our opinion, for interpreters to identify or side with them.

Interpreters are:

- isolated in soundproof booths, physically removed from the conference room (either at the back of the room or on another level in the same room)
- present but not involved in face-to-face interaction, with interpreters seeing speakers either on the screen installed in the booths or from considerable distance
- anonymous but audible

\textbf{5.7.2 Means of intervention}

In terms of the means of intervention, we can say that due to the distance it is almost impossible for the interpreter:

- to ask for a figure, term or phrase to be repeated
- to ask for clarification
- to ask the speaker to slow down (in some cases the interpreter can address a chair or a delegate to explain that the speaker is speaking very fast).

As stated above, we do not know whether this type of intervention has any influence on interpreters’ neutrality, but we can state that it can help to assert the interpreter’s presence as an active participant in the interaction. In the absence of such a possibility, however, the interpreter’s presence is not asserted.

At the discourse level, however, the means of intervention can, we believe, be similar to the means of interpreters working in consecutive. An interpreter may:

- eliminate redundant elements of speech or alter or omit parts of the message
- change the initial structure of sentences and reformulate them

\textsuperscript{17} Excerpt from the letter of AIIC respondent to questionnaire of C. Angelelli, Appedix 3, Revisiting the Interpreter’s Role, 2004
• mitigate face-threatening acts: make offensive language sound more neutral and neutralize emotions

• choose not to interpret a phrase such as “now I will tell you an anecdote”, or choose not to indicate the number of reasons or questions which are about to be given, thus insuring himself/herself against making a mistake

• correct a mistake made by a speaker (in certain circumstances)

As with the consecutive mode, we believe that when interpreters eliminate redundant elements of speech or reformulate or omit parts of the message we cannot say precisely whether they always do this for semantic, ethical or other purposes. For example, Seeber and Zegler (2007) provide an example in which all the interpreters working in SI for a particular conference chose not to render a sentence in which the master of ceremonies likened a head of state to a traffic cop. The authors argue that such a betrayal of the speaker could be justified on ethical grounds (on the basis that the attempt at humor was not appropriate. We can see a parallel between this and our example with the Russian filmmaker. The modes are different but in both cases the interpreters made a choice to save face on behalf of the party concerned. We can say that the interpreters in this example made an independent decision relying on their understanding of the situation. It is possible in our view to argue that when interpreters make such responsible decisions or act under the influence of their own knowledge, cultural background, personal experience, beliefs, etc. the second and third neutrality criteria will not be fulfilled in this case, and fulfillment of the fourth criterion will also be problematic. Interpreters cannot be indifferent to the outcome of interaction if they mitigate face threatening acts (as in the example cited above) or if they correct a speaker’s mistake.

5.7.3 Time constraints

We believe that the parameter of time constraints is very important for the analysis of the SI working environment. The particular features with regards to the time frame are:

• interpreters work in pairs, with each shift lasting thirty minutes; on average, then, they work for approximately half a day; they never interpret a discussion or series of speeches in its entirety
• interpreters have less time to analyze nuances of behavior on the part of the parties and power imbalances between them

Interpreters in SI work in real time, interpreting while listening. They do not have time to capture the nuances of the relationships between different participants of the conference. Working in shifts and for only part of the day, they will probably not gain any complete appreciation of what is going on in the conference. They spend no time with their clients, and so it is impossible for them to become acquainted with the participants of the conference/meeting and to ask any questions concerning the subject of their speech. Again, there is no opportunity to establish a direct relationship between them.

By way of a summary, and to facilitate direct comparison between the simultaneous and consecutive modes, we present our data in Table 1 below. There are two main sections: consecutive and simultaneous. Each section is split into two columns: parameters (name of the parameter and its different manifestations) and potential threats to neutrality (for each particular mode). Explanations of why a particular manifestation of a given parameter can threaten interpreters’ neutrality is provided in sections 5.6. and 5.7 above, and so the second column represents the statement of whether there is or is not any threat to the interpreter’s neutrality.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Consecutive</strong></th>
<th><strong>Simultaneous</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical location of interpreter</strong></td>
<td><strong>Threat to neutrality</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The interpreter is in face-to-face contact with the audience and with the parties to negotiations; captures non-verbal means of expression; can deduce the nuances of the relationship between the parties and the power differentials that exist between them; is in a direct relationship with the parties; is included in the procedural order (one party speaks, the interpreter translates, then the other party responds; the parties accept the interpreter’s presence and can address him/her directly)</td>
<td>The interpreter has no face-to-face interaction with the audience or the speakers; is isolated in the booth; has no direct relationship with the delegates (except through an official representative); is engaged in anonymous communication (interpreters see the clients but not vice versa) and clients hear only a voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Means of intervention in procedural matters</strong></td>
<td><strong>Implications for neutrality</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The interpreter may ask participants not to speak quickly; ask for a question, term or figure to be repeated; ask the participants to respect the time limit of 5-6 minutes; ask the participants to take turns to speak (rather than having everybody speak at the same time).</td>
<td>Threat to neutrality is unclear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Means of intervention in the discourse

**The interpreter may:**
- eliminate redundant elements of speech or alter or omit parts of the message
- change the initial structure of sentences and reformulate them
- mitigate face-threatening acts: make offensive language sound more neutral and neutralize emotions
- provide additional explanations of terms, anecdotes, proverbs or cultural references
- correct a mistake made by a speaker (in certain circumstances);

**Threat to neutrality**
- eliminate redundant elements of speech or alter or omit parts of the message
- change the initial structure of sentences and reformulate them
- mitigate face-threatening acts: make offensive language sound more neutral and neutralize emotions
- choose not to interpret a phrase such as “now I will tell you an anecdote”, or choose not to indicate the number of reasons or questions which are about to be given, thus insuring himself/herself against making a mistake
- correct a mistake made by a speaker (in certain circumstances)

### Time constraint

**The interpreter can:**
- establish direct contact with the participants
- have time to meet participants before the meeting and ask them questions about the subject of the meeting
- work longer hours (days, weeks) with the same speakers (long negotiations, interpreting the same person)

In whispering an interpreter is sitting behind one or two participants (and is therefore closer to them than to other participants).

**Interpreters:**
- work in pairs, with each shift lasting thirty minutes; on average, then, they work for approximately half a day; they never interpret a discussion or series of speeches in its entirety
- do not have a chance to become acquainted with the participants in the conference or meeting
- have no time to capture the nuances of the relationship and to establish contact with participants

**Threat to neutrality**
- There is less threat to neutrality

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**6. Conclusion**

In this paper we have analyzed whether the mode of interpreting (simultaneous or consecutive) may influence interpreters’ neutrality. In order to make a direct comparison we needed, first of all, to understand what the term “neutrality” means and whether there is a problem with neutrality in conference interpreting. In order to do this we studied different definitions of neutrality from such fields as politics, psychoanalysis, physics,
translation, the natural sciences and mediation. We discovered that the main difficulty lies in the fact that there are numerous definitions for the word ‘neutral’, and there is no one-size-fits-all definition of the term. Consequently, it is not possible to define this term precisely and apply it to every situation. Moreover, such terms as impartiality (in the field of mediation), transparency (in the field of translation) and invisibility (in conference interpreting) are sometimes used instead of neutrality. Considering the variety of definitions, we decided to limit ourselves to the definitions of neutrality used in the field of mediation. Neutral mediators:

- do not identify themselves with any of the parties and do not take sides
- have no influence of their own beliefs, opinions and feelings
- have no prior knowledge of the dispute and/or the parties
- are indifferent to the outcome of the interaction

We made this choice for two reasons. First of all, we thought that we could relate mediation to interpreting. Secondly, we discovered that the problem of mediators’ neutrality is a hotly debated subject as there is an apparent contradiction between the two notions and many scholars challenge the requirement of neutrality in a mediator, indicating the gap between theory and practice. In theory, a mediator must be neutral (in line with the criteria mentioned above) but being neutral excludes mediation, i.e. the intervention in a conflict in order to assist the disputants with their decision-making. In practice, the neutrality debate becomes even more complicated if we acknowledge that each mediation process is unique and consists of many components which form a particular context. It is difficult to state clearly what roles mediators play and whether they can always be neutral. It is more reasonable to think of mediators’ different roles as a continuum stretching from the most passive roles to the most heavily involved activities.

The problem of neutrality is mainly discussed in community interpreting, while according to the perceptions of conference interpreters this problem is not relevant for their field. We argue that the mode (simultaneous or consecutive) might influence the neutral status of a conference interpreter. We defined the criteria of neutrality (the components of the definition mentioned above) and three parameters characterizing both working contexts:
the interpreter’s physical location, the interpreter’s means of intervention in an interaction and time constraints. In Table 1 we presented the direct comparison of consecutive and simultaneous interpreting with regard to the potential threat to interpreters’ neutrality. The results of our analysis show that there is greater potential for an interpreter to be involved in interaction in consecutive than in the simultaneous mode as the consecutive interpreter is placed literally “in between” the parties so that there is direct contact between them. The more involved in the interaction interpreters are, the less neutral they will be. In the simultaneous mode the means of intervention are more limited. The interpreter is almost invisible (he/she is merely audible). If communication between interpreters in the booth on the one hand and the audience/speakers on the other becomes formal and anonymous then there will be less potential for interpreters to establish a direct relationship with the parties, and consequently they will draw very close to the ideal situation of a completely neutral interpreter. If we were to establish a continuum for the involvement of an interpreter in the interaction, it would stretch from the least involved in the simultaneous mode to the most involved in the consecutive mode.

In conclusion, we cannot claim that the interpreter is or should be a mediator. We believe that in all cases interpreters should strive to be neutral. At the same time, there are clearly some aspects of a mediator’s work which can also be found in the work of an interpreter (for example, mediators’ communication-facilitation strategies as discussed in Chapter 4), and these cannot be ignored. It remains unclear whether the work of an interpreter involves the aspects of the work of a mediator as it is understood in the conflict management sense regardless of context. If this is the case, then it is not clear if the interpreter’s mediating role interpreter poses a threat to neutrality (again in every situation). If we talk about mediators we see that they are expected to intervene in the dispute or negotiations, and they come to the negotiation table to help to find solutions. That is why the contradiction between the principle of mediators’ neutrality and the objective of the mediation process is so apparent. In mediation it is even possible (as we mentioned above) for a mediator to reveal their partiality or bias openly. We cannot imagine the same happening in the context of conference interpreting. The interpreter’s role is perceived as more functional. Interpreters are expected to facilitate communication but, where all other aspects are concerned, to remain as transparent as glass.
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