

Legal Interpreters for Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong: Identities and Cultural Mediation

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ABSTRACT

This study explores identity construction of ethnic minority (EM) language interpreters working for the Judiciary and law enforcement bodies in Hong Kong. It also examines how an act of incorporating cultural differences into interpreting emerges as an immanent aspect of EM identity. Interpreters' background and their close affiliation with a respective language and culture enables them to identify cultural differences in interpreting, thus such detection and potential mitigation through drawing attention and clarification, reinforces their EM identity in interpreting practice. Cultural mediation however, is determined by a number of elements intertwined within the field of practice: hierarchical positioning of interlocutors, existing system and interpreters' codes of practice, service providers' and interpreters' perception and attitudes, as well as interpreting competence and education. Therefore, identity construction of EM interpreters and their approaches towards cultural differences both remain a product of an on-going interaction between the mainstream legal system and existing mechanism in interpreting services on the one hand, and interpreters' insight on the other. Along the process of interpreting, interpreters' identities are constructed and reconstructed through negotiations between how they are perceived by others in terms of policies and daily practice, and how they see themselves as interpreters. While the study focuses on identities and cultural mitigation in interpreting, it provides the basis for identifying issues in interpreting in EM languages and further professionalising interpreting services.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 provides background information on EM groups in Hong Kong and the need for interpreting services and systems in place specific to Hong Kong. Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework used for the analysis of the data compiled. Chapter 3 explains the research methodology adopted for this project. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are analytical chapters. Chapter 7 concludes the thesis. In terms of research methodology, this project used ethnography in regard of participant observation in courtroom settings and in-depth interviews with the practicing interpreters, as well as questionnaires for the available institutional service providers.

KEYWORDS: cultural mitigation, ethnic minority, identity

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