

## Spirit medium language mediation: A neglected form of interpreting?

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### Abstract

*While the need for interpreting has been growing as can be evidenced by intensification of research on interpreting and establishment and expansion of interpreting institutions and course programmes worldwide, the interpreting research landscape has been devoid of insightful research on African indigenous forms of interpreting. Using the Bhasukuma<sup>1</sup> spirit medium transcendental language mediation (henceforth TLM) as a case study, the present paper examines interpreting definitional criteria in a bid to make a comparison with TLM features and determine what the comparison may reveal with regard to the relationship between interpreting and TLM. To achieve this objective, the researcher used literature research to glean the criteria used by previous interpreting scholars to define the concept interpreting, after which the criteria were used as an observation schedule for fieldwork observations. Results indicate that TLM exhibits all of the criteria used in defining interpreting. The present paper, therefore, concludes that the Bhasukuma spirit medium TLM is an indigenous form of interpreting, to which people have not been exposed and recommends that African scholars should take the responsibility of educating and re-educating the world about their unknown realities to better the understanding of the same.*

**Keywords:** interpreting, indigenous interpreting, transcendental language mediation

### Introduction

Since the inception of the need for interpreting, when polyglossia imposed communication constraints upon human race and brought

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<sup>1</sup> A Bantu ethnic group which is the largest in Tanzania with the population of between five to six million members, representing about 16 percent of the country's total population.

language confusion (Giambruno, 2008; Pöchhacker, 2004, 2016), interpreting studies field has been growing exponentially and increasingly becoming important (Baker, 2011, pp. 7-8). As a result, research has been intensified and interpreting institutions and course programmes have been established and expanded worldwide (Mpemba, 2015, p. 38). While this has been the case, the interpreting research landscape has remained devoid of insightful research on African indigenous forms of interpreting. Some scholars have advanced the view that this is a result of Western cultural and intellectual imperialistic influences (Ani, 1994, 1997; Asante, 2003; Boehmer, 2005; Clarke, 1992; Mswazie & Mudyahoto, 2013). Their argument is that for the last five centuries, the world has been under control of a form of European nationalism in which the Europeans have created 'cultural othering' where they declare things they do not understand as primitive. Using the concept of 'cultural othering', the Europeans have also laughed at other peoples realities and have misused education and the Bible to teach other people to do the same (Clarke, 1992, p. xvi). It is argued that due to Western cultural and intellectual imperialistic influences, therefore, many African and non-African scholars and researchers have tended to see African realities, one of which is TLM, as culturally constrained and timid to study (Mswazie & Mudyahoto, 2013). This has led to lack of exposure of African people, and the academic community at large, to many African realities and as a consequence, Africans have been shying away from their traditions and glorifying foreign cultures instead.

Studies have indicated that the whole story started with the advent of colonialism and continued throughout the entire colonial period (Ani, 1994, 1997; Asante, 2003; Clarke, 1991, 1992). During this period, the colonialists are said to have lit a tunnel of realities of the colonised people with artificial Western beams that glorified the colonisers and everything of theirs as superior, on one hand, and despised, marginalised and condemned the colonised and their cultures, on the other. To serve their own selfish objectives, the colonisers represented the colonised as less human, less civilised, as children or savages, wild men and women, animals, or headless mass (Achebe, 1988, p. 45; Boehmer, 2005, p. 76). They conquered the minds of the colonised and convinced themselves and the colonised that they were indispensable to civilisation and that without them civilisation would not have existed (Clarke, 1992,

p. xvi). According to Ani (1997, p. 1), the colonised were told all these for so long and with social scientific expertise to the extent of believing the propaganda of the oppressors, on one hand, and to the extent of having difficulty to believe otherwise, on the other hand. This instilled and left behind tremendous negative effects to the colonised such as persistent denial of their heritage, self-denial, self-hatred and intellectual enslavement (Ani, 1997, pp. 1 & 13; Asante, 2003, p. 2).

Today, many decades after the physical presence of the colonialists had left, the ex-colonised peoples' minds are still crowned with the image of Europeans as superior beings; the adored life of the ex-colonies has become that of a world defined by the promises and limits of a Western modernity, which serves as a measure of any accomplished individual and a dream of every one aspiring for a good life (Ani, 1994, p. xxi). African realities are mainly perceived, as Clarke (1991, p. xi) would aver, "through the eyes of conquerors, missionaries, and adventurers", whose interpretation of these realities is, in most cases, "a kind of sick fantasy". In light of this, what Westerners think is what defines the universe; they build institutions based on their worldview that teach the rest of the ex-colonised world to think according to their rules. Based on the Western truth in which they are educated, the ex-colonised define themselves as inferior objects of Western domination (Ani, 1994, p. xxx). As Ani (1994, p. 1) would bring this point home, the West has created intellectual mystification that prevents their victims "from thinking in a manner that would lead to authentic self-determination." Therefore, one may possibly argue that, due to the colonial influence, even the focus of interpreting studies research landscape has always been on such Western phenomena as conference interpreting, court interpreting, community-based interpreting, and on educational interpreting, especially in educational settings that have multilingual, dual, and parallel medium policies to which people are often exposed. However, this approach appears to be falsifying reality and inculcating a misleading belief that there can be no interpreting outside those areas, and has led to a neglect of indigenous forms of interpreting such as TLM. It is, therefore, the present paper's quest to examine interpreting definitional criteria and make a comparison with TLM features to determine what the comparison may reveal with regard to the relationship between interpreting and TLM. This

examination may help us arrive at a conclusion of whether or not TLM is a form of interpreting.

Although it may be convincing to blame Western cultural and intellectual imperialistic influences as a reason for a neglect of African realities, this line of argument may be viewed as an unwarranted excuse. These realities may be unknown because people have not been exposed to them. Thus, as Achebe (1988) would rightly argue, African scholars “cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration...” (p. 45). It should, therefore, be our duty as African scholars to expose African realities from our own experiences so as to better our and our people’s understanding of the phenomena of concern to us. In view of this, the present paper, using the *Bhasukuma* spirit medium TLM as a case study, seeks to speak from an African experience since, as one of the African wise sayings goes, “Until the lions have their own historians, the tale of the hunt will always glorify the hunter”.

### **Justification of the Study**

The present study is justifiable in that it intellectualises African cultural resources, which have not been visible to many people. It, therefore, seeks intellectual visibility of African realities. Even though the paper argues that blaming Western cultural and intellectual imperialistic influences as a reason for African reality neglect is an unwarranted excuse, the present researcher recognises the fact that Western modernity has suppressed African and many non-western cultures in one way or another. The suppression was engineered during colonial rule by importation of European classifications and codes that were matched to peoples, cultures and topographies, which were entirely un-European (Boehmer, 2005, p. 17).

The suppression African and many non-western cultures is still a common practice. Propelled by supremacist mentality, self-exculpation and self-congratulation, Western thought still revolves around the desire to achieve monopoly in the creation of knowledge and analytical frameworks. The existing knowledge points to the fact that Westerners have set universal conventions, standards, models and approaches, inter alia, as a yardstick through which they evaluate and judge African realities (Ani, 1994, 1997; Asante, 2003; Clarke, 1992). They expect African realities to conform to the Western norms, standards and conventions. They try to

Europeanise every African reality. According to Ani (1994, p. 33), the Western mind is trained from childhood to think in terms of dichotomies where the dichotomy “is presented, then the process of valuation occurs in which one term is valued and the other is devalued”. “One is considered ‘good,’ positive, superior; the other is considered ‘bad,’ negative, inferior.” It is through this worldview, with the concept of ‘cultural othering’ in mind, the Westerners judge ‘other cultures’; non-European cultures.

Because African culture is replete with symbols and symbolic behaviour that reflect religious world view, African behaviour makes no sense to non-Africans if the symbols are approached literally from a non-African world view and Africans become primitive who act like children (Ani, 1997, p. 10). This has been very much the case with Eurocentrists. For instance, approaching African realities from a Eurocentric worldview, the conquerors, adventurers and missionaries, especially Christian missionaries, have unjustly condemned many African indigenous realities as witchy, sorceric, pagan, barbaric, cultish, primitive, backward, detestable, uncivilised, evil, savage, heathen, spiritist and the likes (Bhabha, 1994; Boehmer, 2005; Stroeken, 2008), without having a fair hearing from the Africans themselves. As Ani (1997, p. 13) would rightly bring this point home, to be European has become equal to having value and to be African has become equal to being without value.

There are many cases of condemnation that one can cite as evidence. For example, the Christian Holy book, the Bible, tells of God’s warning to the Israelites against becoming involved in spiritist and mediumistic practices upon their entry into the Promised Land of Canaan. These practices are deemed detestable to the Lord God:

When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord (Deuteronomy 18: 9-12 New International Version).

Furthermore, in Leviticus 20 verse 6, God warns to turn his face against anyone who practices spiritism and mediumship: “I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute himself by following them. I will cut him off from his people.” These kinds of teachings have forced many African Christian converts to refute indigenous practices. It is, therefore, convincing to believe that Western influences have played a major role in marginalisation of many non-western realities. As a result, African people have abandoned their cultures and associated themselves with foreign ones. It is, thus, not surprising to see that many people are not exposed to these realities. The present study, therefore, comes in as an avenue for sensitising African people to guard against fabricated realities, and realise and see value in theirs. The study also comes in as an avenue for creating awareness on and exposure to African realities, particularly TLM, to those who are not aware of the realities.

The paper uses the *Bhasukuma* spirit medium TLM as a case study because of the value it still commands among the *Bhasukuma*. Despite that many African Christian converts have refuted their indigenous practices, many of the *Bhasukuma* have remained conservative as they overtly or covertly keep on observing the practices due to their strong attachment to and belief in the practices (Maganda, 2002; Mswazie & Mudyahoto, 2013; Ogembo, 2005; Stroeken, 2008). For instance, they strongly believe that there are ailments that Western medicine cannot cure, but indigenous medicine only can (Ogembo, 2005; Mswazie & Mudyahoto, 2013). Many *Bhasukuma* Christian converts and ordinary people have decided to go back to their traditions by resorting to “the use of traditional methods of healing that their ancestors lived by” (Ogembo, 2005, p. v) following an escalation of Western medicine prices. This is due to structural adjustment programmes by the World Bank, which compelled African governments to withdraw free medication and introduce cost-sharing plans, which many people cannot afford.

Apart from the Christian converts and ordinary people, recent developments in research indicate that even rich and powerful people, such as politicians, corporate managers, and senior civil servants, among others, have been noticed to be often consulting spirit mediums for facilitation into accessing positions, protection, fortification and other related services (see, for example, Mswazie &

Mudyahoto, 2013, p. 170). They believe that they can only achieve these through indigenous medicinal intervention. This suggests that, as Mswazie and Mudyahoto (2013, p. 174) put it, “Indigenous knowledge continues to shield and sustain indigenous people against the forces of modernity.” As such, indigenous medicine and its accompanying practices, such as TLM, are increasingly becoming more important in the eyes of the *Bhasukuma* and many Africans today as they were in the past. However, they are still a neglected area of attention, because little is known about them as they have attracted little scholarly attention. The present study seeks to make a knowledge contribution so as to lessen this knowledge dearth.

The researcher chose to study TLM because it is an important accompanying practice to the *Bhasukuma* indigenous medicine institution. Many of the *Bhasukuma* indigenous healers diagnose and communicate their diagnoses after they have been possessed and empowered by their ancestral spirits to speak in transcendental utterances. The message they communicate is usually not readily accessible to the audience until a mediator has deciphered it.

The deciphering of communication between the spirits and the audience is akin to interpreting and has been going on in the *Bhasukuma* communities and Africa at large for a long time. However, little is known about it in interpreting scholarly discourse. Due to its perceived witchy, pagan, cultish, and primitive nature, on one hand, and Western intellectual imperialism, which has exposed people to foreign realities, on the other hand, it has attracted little attention from scholars. That is why the interpreting research landscape has been European-dominated. Although there are studies on interpreting and spirit mediumship (see, for example, Bilby, 1983; Erdtsieck, 2001, 2003; Banks, 2011), most of them are conducted outside Africa and mostly by non-Africans. Their focus has always been on inter-lingual and intercultural communication, with emphasis on natural and signed languages in conference interpreting, court interpreting, community-based interpreting and educational interpreting, as if there could be no interpreting outside such purviews. The present study, therefore, comes at an opportune time to rectify this state of affairs by examining TLM as stated in the introductory section.

## Research design and methodology

To achieve its research objective, the present study used three qualitative research methods to facilitate data collection, namely

literature research<sup>2</sup>, participant and non-participant observations, and semi-structured interviews. Literature research was used to glean the criteria used by previous interpreting scholars in defining the concept *interpreting*. This approach was deemed suitable for this kind of data because it seemed more productive than any other method. Literature research is the only method that can offer as wide a spectrum as possible when one wants to survey what the previous scholars have said. The researcher gleaned the criteria over a period of one year, between May 2013 and May 2014. After the gleaning process, the criteria were then used as an observation schedule to guide 48 fieldwork observations between June 2014 and January 2017 in four Tanzanian administrative regions of Geita, Mwanza, Shinyanga and Simiyu, collectively known as Sukumaland or *Bhusukuma*.

Observations were preferred to other methods because they are good in explaining meaning in real contexts and are strong on data validity and in-depth understanding. Since TLM is not widely researched and documented, it could not be possible to gather its features via such methods as literature research. Questionnaire method was also inappropriate because many spirit mediums and their language mediators do not have writing competence; many of them are not trained in the formal Western education settings.

After the TLM features had been identified through observations, the researcher also conducted 66 semi-structured interviews with the participants (24 with spirit mediums, 24 with their mediators and 18 with their clients) to find out the terms they use in describing *interpreting*, in order to complement what he might have missed in the observations and literature.

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<sup>2</sup> A data gathering technique in which the researcher uses published and unpublished pieces of writing or printed information, such as books, journals, dissertations, among others, on a particular subject as sources of his or her data. It is commonly referred to as *desk research*. However, I avoided this term as now, with modern technologies, one does not necessarily need a desk to read the pieces of writing.



Geita, Mwanza, Shinyanga and Simiyu administrative regions were preferred as research site because of strategic reasons. The first reason was availability of the research participants. The researcher grew up in Mwanza, one of the administrative regions, witnessing mediation of spirit medium language. He was, therefore, quite sure that the research participants were available. The second reason was prevalence of the target spirit mediums (the *Bhasukuma* spirit mediums). The *Bhasukuma* are concentrated in the said regions and the spirit mediums are still available in good numbers and are still consulted in these regions due to the spirituality of the *Bhasukuma* and their strong attachment to African traditional religion. It is said that the *Bhasukuma* are still the most reluctant group to convert into foreign religions and modernity compared to other ethnic groups in Tanzania (Maganda, 2002, p. 148; Tanner, 1999, p. 194). Easy accessibility to the researcher was another reason. The researcher is knowledgeable about the area. The regions were, therefore, sampled purposively as they served the purpose of the study better.

### **Theoretical framework**

To guide the gathering, analysis and interpretation of the data, the present study adopted ideas from discourse-based interaction (henceforth DI) theory, which emerged in the 1980s as an effort to address the interest-toward-international-conference-interpreting skewness. Of interest to the present study is the fact that DI theory recognises interpreting performed by 'untrained' linguistic and cultural mediators engaging in 'non-professional' interpreting in informal settings as deserving scholarly attention (Pöchhacker, 2016, p. 144). TLM is typical of this interpreting form since it is performed by informally trained mediators. The DI theory accounts for authentic interpreter-mediated encounters focusing on discourse in interaction between two or more parties that are involved in communication, but entangled in a barrier because they have different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The tenet of DI theory that the present study harnesses is that interpreting is functional; its ultimate purpose is to serve as communication facilitation to interlocutors entangled in a communication barrier emanating from linguistic and cultural background differences.

Apart from the DI theory, the present study also adopted postcoloniality and Afrocentricity as useful tools in situating the tendency by scholars to shy away from investigating indigenous

forms of interpreting, among other indigenous realities, and African people's avoidance of their traditions in favour of foreign cultures; deconstructing imposed realities; and posing resistance to the perceptions of the West as a world dominant power in almost every sphere of life.

Postcoloniality does not simply mean which came after colonialism, but which critically or subversively scrutinises the colonial relationship by setting out in one way or another to resist colonialist perspectives. It seeks to reshape the dominant meanings and give expression to the colonised experience by undercutting thematically and formally the discourse supporting colonisation such as the "myths of power, the race classifications," and "the imagery of surbodination" (Boehmer, 2005, p. 3). Among the tenets that inspired the present researcher to adopt postcoloniality is that colonial establishment's success depended on 'othering' the colonised people, that is, seeing them as dramatically different from and lesser than the coloniser. One example of 'othering' is that of seeing the colonised as savages who needed education and rehabilitation and regarding their cultures as not up to the standard. The 'othering' process is supported by knowledge creation, writing of literary and functional texts such as "law reports, journalistic articles and anthropological journals" (Boehmer, 2005, p. 5), inter alia, that distort the experiences and realities of colonised people. Postcoloniality, thus, poses resistance to such injustice (Boehmer, 2005, p. 7). Given that training of interpreters, and studies on interpreting have been largely Eurocentric (Baker, 2011, p. 7), dominated by Western institutions, trainers, research, theories, models and approaches, inter alia, the result of which is interpreting studies' focus on Western phenomena like conference interpreting to the expense of African indigenous interpreting types such as TLM, postcoloniality seems to be an ideal analytical tool in the present study's endeavour to radically critique and intervene in the situation of injustice.

Therefore, like how the West monopolised knowledge creation, writing of literary and functional texts and everything produced during colonial time to organise and reinforce the perceptions of the West being superior in all spheres of life (Boehmer, 2005, p. 1), the West still monopolises knowledge; Western models and parameters still guide the global standards. In the field of interpreting, the Western models and parameters are the ones that are used as a yardstick

to determine what should be regarded as interpreting, its types and guiding principles, inter alia. Since post-colonialism interrogates the Western powers, and since the present study intellectualises a marginalised intangible phenomenon of the then colonised African society, the present researcher is convinced that postcoloniality is the best-suited theory for the present study's anchorage.

Afrocentricity foregrounds and privileges African agency and active participation in making their own history, experiences, culture, knowledge and other realities (Asante, 2007, p. 2). It places precedence on the lived experiences of the African people and builds its theoretical heritage on African ideals (Asante, 2003, p. 2). It, thus, poses resistance to the perceptions of the West as a world dominant power in all spheres of life and it deconstructs the colonial terminology and ideals. Given that *Bhasukuma* spirit medium TLM is an African reality, an experience lived by Africans who reconnect with their classical values and principles via ancestral spirits, Afrocentricity is considered an ideal theory to give the present intellectualisation of African cultural resources a deserving visibility.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The data gathered demonstrate three findings of interest on the definition of interpreting, the salient features of TLM and on the relationship between interpreting and TLM. The following subsection presents these findings and the next one offers a discussion.

### **Findings**

With regard to defining interpreting, the data indicate that, depending on their academic socialisation and underlying theoretical assumptions, interpreting scholars have decided differently on “what to bring into view, what to foreground, in which light and from what angle” (Pöchhacker, 2004, p. 2). Consequently, there have been countless definitions of the term. However, all of the definitions can be subsumed under five central ideas, called memes (Pöchhacker, 2009, pp. 133-134, 2016, *passim*). The first meme views interpreting as a *form of translation* in which the source-language message is presented only once, and thus cannot be reviewed or replayed, and the re-expression of the message in the target-language is produced under time pressure, with little chance for correction and revision (Gile, 2009; Pöchhacker, 2004, 2009, 2010, 2016; Schäfner, 2004). The second meme considers interpreting as a *discourse production*

*process*, defined as the process of conversational exchanges between two primary speakers who take turns through an interpreter (Roy, 2000, pp. 3-4). The third meme regards interpreting as a *cognitive information processing activity* in which the interpreter is responsible for comprehending and re-expressing verbal messages (Pöchhacker, 2009, p. 134; Mshindo, 2010, p. 32). As such, within this conceptual framework, the interpreting task is defined as “a fairly complex form of human information processing involving the reception, storage, transformation, and transmission of verbal information” (Gerver, 1971, p. viii, in Pöchhacker, 2004, p. 55).

The fourth meme is based on *mediation* assumption and conceptualises interpreting as a mediated interaction between two or more communicating parties with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Pöchhacker, 2004; 2008; 2009). And the last meme conceptualises interpreting as a *sense-making endeavour* in which the interpreter strives to produce an interpretation that is based on sense for sense transfer, not on word for word, and thus fulfils the communicative needs of the intended audience (Seleskovitch, 1968/1978; Lederer, 1994/2003, 2010; Pöchhacker, 2004). Scholars like Baker (2011) have advised that ethics and morals should also guide interpreters in their endeavours.

In the final analysis, based on discourse interaction theory, which focuses on interpreting as a communicative activity, all the definitions boil down to a unified definition that considers interpreting as: a communicative activity consisting in cognitive processing of information to produce utterances/signs/texts that are presumed to have similar or equivalent sense or meaning and/or effect as previously existing/produced utterances/signs/texts in another language/mode of communication and/or culture based on one-time presentation/availability of an utterance/sign/text in a source language and immediate production of target language utterance/sign/text guided by ethics and morality. This takes place under time pressure with little chance for correction and revision for the purpose of enabling or facilitating communication/interaction between parties entangled in communication barrier in a given setting/situation/context because of language and/or cultural differences.

Informed by the foregoing definition, the data further point to the fact that five key interpreting definitional criteria can be identified

in interpreting studies literature. Table 5.1 summarises the criteria, which were gleaned from the literature consulted. The criterion column summarises them; the description column describes what the criterion mentioned in the criterion column means; and the source column shows the literature from which the relevant criterion was found.

Table 5.1 Criteria for Defining Interpreting as Obtained from Literature

<b>S/No.</b>	<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Source</b>
1	Instantaneity or immediacy	Interpreting is performed 'here and now' for the benefit of people who want to engage in communication across barriers of language and culture.	Kade (1968) , cited in Pöchhacker (2004, p. 10); Seleskovitch (1968/1978, p. 2); Pöchhacker (2004, p. 10; 2010, p. 154); Gercek (2011, p. 7)
2	Ephemerality	Interpreting is performed in a transient or short-lived event	Pöchhacker (2004, p. 11)
3	Real-timeliness or contemporaneity	Interpreting is 'real-time' or 'live' human translation in an essentially shared communicative context; speakers produce text contemporaneously.	Pöchhacker (2009, p. 128; 2010, p. 154); Hale (2007, p. 128)
4	Unrepeatability or irreversibility or one-time availability/ presentation of source text	The source-language text is presented only once and thus cannot be repeated (reviewed or replayed).	Kade (1968), cited in Pöchhacker (2004, p. 10; 2010, p. 154); Schäfner (2004, p. 1-2); Gercek (2011, p. 7)
5	Uncorrection-ability and irreversibility of target text due to time pressure for its production	The target-language text is produced under time pressure, with little chance for correction and revision.	Kade (1968), cited in Pöchhacker (2004, p. 10)

The data demonstrate further that TLM exhibits all of the criteria used in defining and determining what interpreting is (shown in the criterion column of table 5.1). Table 5.2 makes a comparison between interpreting definitional criteria and TLM features. It shows which interpreting definitional criteria tallied with TLM features.

Table 5.2 Comparison of Interpreting Definitional Criteria and TLM Features

S/N.	Criterion	Relevance to TLM
1	Instantaneity or immediacy	All of the TLMs observed were performed instantaneously. The purpose—to facilitate interaction between people who wanted to engage in communication across barriers of language and culture—was the same. However, the extent of cultural barrier was minimal as most of the clients shared culture with the spirits, spirit mediums and the mediators.
2	Ephemerality	All of the TLMs observed were performed in short-lived events. This was only during that times when the spirit mediums were in ecstasy. In each of the events observed, the interpretation stopped either right after the spirit had departed or a little while later.
3	Real-timeliness or contemporaneity	All of the TLMs observed were real-time. The mediators were interpreting contemporaneously. They were interpreting live events as the source messages were coming directly and contemporaneously from the initiators, the spirits. Put differently, none of the utterances interpreted was recorded.
4	Unrepeatability or irreversibility or one-time availability/presentation of source text	The spirit speaks only once. However, there is some kind of possibility of repeating the source-language message in TLM because if the interpreter misses out, the spirit medium can consult the spirit afresh. Although this is the case, it is not guaranteed that the presentation of the message repeated will still be the same.

5	Uncorrectionability and irreversibility of target text due to time pressure for its production	All of the TLMs observed were performed under time pressure and were uncorrectable and irreversible. There was no time for revision and for consulting any other party for advice or any translator's tools such as dictionaries, lexicons, grammars, terminology lists or IT related tools such as corpora, online databases, internet and online forums for corrections.
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Apart from these features, TLM is also performed in a naturalistic setting and does not require any form of modern technology: no microphones and (loud) speakers; no pen and notebook, because no note-taking is involved.

**Discussion**

The data in Table 5.2 demonstrate clearly that TLM exhibits all of the criteria used in defining and determining what should be referred to as interpreting. It is, therefore, a form of interpreting. The question of concern here then is, "Why is interpreting studies discourse silent about TLM?" Two possible answers may be proffered to explain this. First, it is possible that interpreting scholars do not have exposure to this type of interpreting and, therefore, TLM may be a virgin area that requires academic problematisation.

Secondly, it is possible that the Eurocentric nature of interpreting studies has influenced the interpreting scholars' worldview. Consequently, they have unintentionally or deliberately decided to hear and tell a one-sided story, that of Western domination. This can best be accounted for on the basis of Afrocentricity and postcoloniality theoretical perspectives. Afrocentricity, as pointed out by Asante (2007, p. 4), advances that the whites have always enjoyed a white privilege in intellectual matters, and Africans have been viewed as passive recipients of Western concepts, theories, models and approaches, inter alia. As such, our alphabet is Latin; our philosophy is Greek; our interpreting theories and models are Western and we follow Western system of education; let alone watching Western movies and listening to Western songs and playing Western games. Likewise, postcoloniality argues that what the Western powers did, and of course what they continue to do, is to reinforce the perceptions of the West as a world dominant power

in all spheres of life (Boehmer, 2005, p. 1). Boehmer (2005, p. 24) notes further that imperialists cherished an unambiguously heroic image of themselves as conquerors and civilisers of the world. “In view of British imperial nation, its history made up a tale of firsts, bests, and absolute beginnings. Where the British established a cross, a city or colony, they proclaimed the start of a new history. Other histories, by definition were declared of lesser significance or, in certain situations, non-existent” (Boehmer, 2005, p. 24).

The state of affairs described by Asante and Boehmer is very much still the Eurocentrists’ order of the day. In Eurocentric analytical frameworks, something which is written down is regarded as authentic, reliable and superior. Since the *Bhasukuma* spirit medium language mediation is oral, it possibly seems inferior and insignificant. It is not surprising, therefore, to learn that, although it exhibits all the definitional criteria, TLM may not be regarded by Eurocentrists as interpreting. It is either non-existent or something of lesser significance. Therefore, within the Afrocentricity framework and within postcoloniality perspective, it is obvious that the Eurocentrists, who happen to be the ex-conquerors, have their predetermined types of interpreting and are uncomfortable and inflexible to allow other forms, especially those which they consider to be lesser, to be part of the pool.

From interviews, results show that the concept ‘interpreting’ does not exist in *Kisukuma* vocabulary. Instead, three terms, which may be roughly translated as ‘elaborating’/‘clarifying’; ‘finishing-up’/‘finalising’ and ‘disentangling’ were mentioned. These are *wanzuji* ((an act or a process of) explaining, elaborating or clarifying), *bhushikilija* ((an act or a process of) making someone or something—a message in this case—get to their intended/desired destination; getting someone or something across; finalising delivery of something) and *bhusobhooji* ((an act or a process of) disentangling something that has been tangled e.g. a fishnet) respectively. It may be interesting to note that this state of affairs is not limited to the *Bhasukuma* alone. Many other African communities have their different terms explaining the idea of language mediation. Table 5.3 presents a summary of these terms from a variety of African languages.



**Table 5.3 Terms for interpreting, interpretation and interpreter in some African Languages**

S/No	Community	Country in which they are found	Verb 'to Interpret'	Term 'interpreting or interpretation'	Interpreter
1	Zulu	South Africa	<i>Ukhumusha</i>	<i>ubuhumushi</i>	<i>Umhumushi</i>
2	Ndebele	South Africa and Zimbabwe	<i>ukhumutsha</i>	<i>ubuhumutshi</i>	<i>Umhumutshi</i>
3	Shona	Zimbabwe	<i>Kuturikira</i>	<i>uturikiri</i>	<i>Muturikiri</i>
4	Nyambo	Tanzania	<i>okusoboora</i>	<i>obusoboorozi</i>	<i>Omusoboorozi</i>
5	Baganda	Uganda	<i>Kuvunula</i>	<i>obuvunuzi</i>	<i>Omuuvunuzi</i>

Source: Mpemba (2016) and field data gathered between July 2014 and January 2017

What unfolds in the above discussion is commensurate with Afrocentricity's argument that Africans are not merely recipients, but are creators of their own knowledge and life. Therefore, it is very important that we deconstruct each term we come across and situate it in our own contexts and experiences. Achebe would bring this point home nicely by telling us that the Africans' "past—with all its imperfections—was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them" (Achebe, 1988, p. 45).

### **Conclusion**

Following the fast growing need for interpreting which has triggered intensification of research and establishment and expansion of interpreting institutions and course programmes worldwide, on one hand and the void of insightful research on African indigenous forms of interpreting in the interpreting research landscape, the present study set out to examine interpreting definitional criteria and compare them with TLM features to determine what the comparison may reveal with regard to the relationship between the two. The *Bhasukuma* spirit medium TLM was used as a case study. Findings reveal that TLM is instantaneous, ephemeral and contemporary. Findings also reveal that the source messages in TLM are presented once and that given the time pressure involved in its production, once the target message has been uttered, it is

irreversible for correction or revision. All these are the criteria that are used in defining interpreting. It is, therefore, obvious that spirit medium language mediation is an indigenous form of interpreting. It is not known to many people possibly because they have not been exposed to it. Secondly, it is not known to many people possibly because they have been influenced by the Eurocentric nature of interpreting studies to the extent that they have, knowingly or unknowingly, decided to hear and tell a one-sided story, that of the Western dominion. Given that TLM is only one of the 'unknown' African realities, it is recommended that African scholars should take the responsibility of educating and re-educating the world about their unknown realities to better the understanding of the same.

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