

Skills needed to interpret transcendental languages: The case of *Bhasukuma* spirit medium language mediation

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Abstract

While interpreting is increasingly becoming important, some interpreting forms still have no visibility in the field and research landscape, transcendental language mediation (henceforth TLM) being a case in point. The present paper examines linguistic and non-linguistic skills and competencies that are inherent and necessary in interpreting transcendental languages, in view of giving indigenous interpreting forms and sub-forms more visibility in the interpreting research landscape and discourse. As its theoretical underpinning, the paper is guided by ideas from postcoloniality and scriptocentrism. The data were obtained through observation of 24 spirit medium language mediation events and semi-structured interviews to 24 *Bhasukuma* spirit mediums and 24 mediators in Mwanza, Geita, Shinyanga and Simiyu administrative regions of the United Republic of Tanzania. Findings suggest that there are prior-to-mediation-process skills and during-mediation-process skills, which provide more support to the previous studies which found that mediation of transcendental languages is an aspect of interpreting. It is recommended that African scholars should take it as their prerogative to expose more African realities to the world to better peoples' understanding.

Key terms: interpreting, transcendental language mediation, interpreting skills

1.0 Introduction

In the interpreting studies field, so much has been done to assert the independence of the field. However, some interpreting forms such as TLM still have no visibility. Even though TLM has been in practice as a preferred method of providing extra-human and human lingual mediation in many African communities (Beattie & Middleton, 1969; Wijzen & Tanner, 2002; Mutembei, 2013; Mpemba, 2013), it is far from being recognised in interpreting studies research landscape and discourse. Scholars have attributed this to two possibilities. Firstly, this form of interpreting may be unknown, because people have not been exposed to it and, therefore, African scholars should take the responsibility of exposing it and other African realities to the world so as to better peoples' understanding. Secondly, it may be due to the desire of the Western thought to achieve monopoly in the creation of knowledge and analytical frameworks, which is propelled by supremacist mentality, self-exculpation and self-congratulation (Mpemba, 2017, p. 126). Pushed by this desire, for instance, Westerners have come up with universal conventions, models and approaches, *inter alia*, as yardsticks through which they evaluate and judge African realities, expecting conformity

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(Mpemba, 2017, p. 126). Consequently, the indigenous forms of interpreting may probably have a long way to go in terms of visibility and recognition.

Research indicates that TLM shares features with the Western forms of interpreting, especially community-based interpreting, which proves that it is a form of interpreting (see Garbe, 2000; Mpemba, 2017). Building on interpreting research carried out so far, the present paper intends to further the research by Mpemba (2017) by discussing the TLM dynamics, focusing on the skills needed to interpret *Bhasukuma* spirit medium language as observed during healing sessions. The paper examines linguistic and non-linguistic skills and competencies that are inherent and necessary in interpreting transcendental languages that TLM interpreters must master to be able to perform their professional duties. It, thus, seeks to give indigenous forms of interpreting more visibility in the interpreting research landscape and discourse.

2.0 Justification of the study

In the current era of scriptocentrism, where knowledge creation and dissemination is centred on script, many oral realities are regarded as weak, unscientific and non-intellectual. Consequently, they are marginalised and relegated to inferiority. Given that African realities have always been in oral forms, they have suffered this syndrome. The present study attempts to intellectualise one of the African cultural resources, which have not been visible to many people, in view of showing that orality is not the point of weakness. The study, therefore, seeks intellectual visibility of indigenous realities in the interpreting studies research landscape and discourse, in particular, and African realities as well as scholarly discourse in general.

3.0 Research trends in interpretation skills

The abilities and skills needed to interpret into another language started interesting researchers since the 1930s when Jesus Sanz scientifically investigated conference interpreting (Pöchhacker & Liu, 2015). Although the professional field concurred on the need for the abilities and the skills, research remained underdeveloped (Lambert, 1992). It was not until the 1960s and 1970s when serious efforts to tackle this issue were made by the International Association of Conference Interpreters (henceforth AIIC) to come to a better understanding of the prerequisites for a career in professional interpreting (Pöchhacker & Liu, 2015). Up to the 1980s, studies were inclined towards simultaneous interpreting and were mostly informed by experimental psychology (Pöchhacker, 2016, p. 83). The abilities and skills investigated have ranged from cognitive and linguistic to psychosocial. Generally speaking, based on professional experience, training and scholarly perspectives, studies have indicated that ideal conference interpreters are supposed to have command of two foreign languages, lexical fluency, good memory, broad general culture, interpreting attitude, strong mother tongue, love for languages, ability to comprehend and language transfer skills (AIIC, 1965; Keiser, 1978).

Other abilities and skills include mental rapidity, expressive ability, personal qualities (capacity to adapt to subject, speakers etc.; public speaking, tact and diplomacy), physical and psychological stamina, ability to grasp rapidly and to convey the essential meaning of what is being said, ability to project information with confidence, good voice, wide general knowledge and interests, ability to work in team and under stress for long periods (Gerver et al., 1984; Lambert, 1992). These interpreting skills and competences have changed only slightly over the years. AIIC Training Committee (2017) proves this by providing a more recent overall description of such skills and competences as follows: a polished command of native language over a range of registers and domains; a complete mastery of non-native languages; familiarity with the cultures in the countries where the interpreter's working languages are spoken; a commitment to helping others communicate; an interest in and understanding of current affairs, plus an insatiable curiosity; world experience away from home and school and a broad general education; good training (and

usually at least an undergraduate university degree); the ability to concentrate and focus as a discussion unfolds; a pleasant speaking voice; a friendly, collegial attitude; calm nerves, tact, judgment and a sense of humour; and willingness to adhere to rules of conduct (e.g. confidentiality).

In a bid to address the skewness toward conference interpreting, research interests and initiatives on a broader scale emerged in the 1980s. Sign language interpreting and dialogue interpreting [also called community, cultural, public service, institutional, *ad hoc*, liaison and escort interpreting (Garbe, 2000; Wadensjö, 2004; Healthcare Interpretation Network, 2007)] began to be considered seriously as deserving scholarly attention, the focus being on interaction in mediated communication based on discourse-analytical methodology (Pöchhacker, 2016).

The skills studied and recommended for community-based interpreters have also not changed over time and are more or less the same as those expected of a conference interpreter. These include active listening skills; good memory retention skills; ability to take notes during the interpretation assignment; ability to ensure accuracy of the information given; ability to mentally transpose and verbalise into the target language; in depth knowledge and understanding of one's working languages and the required range of language registers; knowledge of subject areas and relevant terminology; strong communication skills; politeness, respect and tact; ability to relate well with people and having good judgment (Hearn, 1981; Pöchhacker, 2001; Healthcare Interpretation Network, 2007). One would expect to read about TLM in literature on community interpreting given that TLM is community-oriented in nature. To the contrary, most of the studies on community interpreting seem to have concentrated on skills and abilities applicable to interpreters operating in such settings as hospitals, courts, lawyers' offices, police departments, government offices, women's shelters, child protection agencies, doctors' offices, physiotherapy clinics and refugee camps. None of the studies known to the present researcher has addressed the issue of abilities needed to interpret transcendental languages, hence the quest of this study.

4.0 Methodology

The data for the present study were gathered through observations and semi-structured interviews. A total of 24 healing session observations were made and 24 *Bhasukuma* spirit mediums and 24 mediators were interviewed in the administrative regions of Mwanza, Geita, Shinyanga and Simiyu. The observations made were both participant and non-participant. During the period of the study, the traditional healers in Tanzania were under a hunt from the Government following albino killings, which they were alleged to instigate. As such, they were trying to avoid new faces. Hence, it was difficult for the researcher to access the study site and disclose his intentions before establishing rapport and trust. Therefore, initially, he went into the spirit mediums' compounds in need of their divine help as a client, accompanied by someone they knew such as the village leader or a former client. He stayed there for some days (between two and four) to observe covertly and establish rapport and trust. It was after the rapport had been established that he declared his interest, obtained consent to observe and observed overtly.

Observations were preferred to other methods as they are good in explaining meaning in real contexts and are strong on data validity and in-depth understanding. The interviews conducted were semi-structured because of their flexibility, which is helpful in producing desired results. It was an ideal technique for providing the researcher with an opportunity for discovering what skills the TLM practitioners think and feel are inherent to and necessary for the *Bhasukuma* spirit medium language mediation enterprise. The technique was also meant to facilitate triangulation of research results. Given that TLM is not widely researched and documented, it was difficult to obtain its interpreting skills from secondary sources and, hence, documentary review could not be an appropriate technique. Questionnaire method was also inappropriate because many

Bhasukuma spirit mediums and their TL mediators do not have the required writing competence as they are not trained in the formal Western education settings. Hence, observations and interviews were the only ideal data collection techniques.

The choice of the research site was based on strategic reasons such as availability of the research participants. The researcher grew up in one of the administrative regions witnessing TLM. As such, he was confident that the participants were available. Secondly, the target spirit mediums were prevalent in the chosen site because the *Bhasukuma* were concentrated in the said regions and the spirit mediums were still available in good numbers and were still consulted due to the spirituality of the *Bhasukuma* and their strong attachment to African traditional religion. The *Bhasukuma* are said to be the most reluctant ethnic group in Tanzania to convert into foreign religions and Western modernity (Tanner, 1999, p. 194; Maganda, 2002, p. 148).

5.0 Theoretical framework

The present study's discussion is informed by the concept of 'othering' from postcoloniality and by scriptocentrism. Postcoloniality does not simply mean which came after colonialism, but which critically scrutinises the colonial relationship by setting out to resist colonialist perspectives, seeking to reshape the dominant meanings and to give expression to the colonised experience by undercutting the discourse supporting colonisation such as the "myths of power" and "the imagery of subordination" (Boehmer, 2005, p. 3). Building on this understanding, Boehmer (2005, p. 3) defines postcoloniality as "that condition in which colonized peoples seek to take their place, forcibly or otherwise, as historical agents ..."

Postcoloniality proceeds from the understanding that the world history for the past few centuries has been profoundly shaped by colonialist interests whose successful colonialism depended on a process of 'othering'; the colonised people were seen as dramatically different from and lesser than their colonisers (Boehmer, 2005, p. 1). For example, they were seen as savages who needed education and rehabilitation. Their cultures were regarded as not up to the standard, and it was, therefore, the prerogative of the colonisers to polish them. Another basic assumption of postcoloniality adopted in this study is that, because of the 'othering' ego, much of knowledge creation, writing of literary and functional texts and everything produced during that time in the colonising cultures often distorted the experiences and realities of the colonised (Boehmer, 2005, p. 5). As such, whatever was produced promoted such interests by, for example, organising and reinforcing the perceptions of the West as a world dominant power in all spheres of life (Boehmer, 2005, p. 1). Thus, postcoloniality poses resistance to such perceptions, drawing its energy "from radical critique and efforts to intervene in situations of social injustice" (Boehmer, 2005, p. 7). In postcoloniality, the ex-colonised natives claim the words to describe their own realities (Boehmer, 2005, p. 10). Coupled with the idea of othering is scriptocentrism. This regards as credible, scientific and intellectual, only that knowledge which is created on the basis of Western procedures and standards and disseminated in writings; people who cannot read and write are seen as ignorant, illiterate, barbaric and headless masses.

The motivation for choosing postcoloniality and scriptocentrism as the guiding frameworks of this study is the fact that studies on interpreting have been largely Eurocentric (Baker, 2011, p. 7), dominated by Western institutions, trainers, research and researchers, theories, models and approaches, inter alia. Therefore, they have tended to focus on Western phenomena like conference interpreting at the expense of African rooted interpreting types such as TLM. Like how knowledge creation and text writing during colonial time served to organise and reinforce the perceptions of the West as a world dominant power, the Western interpreting models and parameters have tended to guide the global standards as they are used as a yardstick to determine what should be regarded as interpreting, its types and guiding principles, inter alia.

Likewise, since most of African realities are expressed orally, they are regarded as weak, unscientific and non-intellectual. Consequently, they are marginalised and relegated to inferiority. Given that postcoloniality and scriptocentrism interrogate the Western powers, and since the present study investigates a marginalised intangible phenomenon of the then colonised African society, the present researcher is convinced that postcoloniality and scriptocentrism are the best-suited anchor frameworks for his study as they provide a tool for looking at the African realities from another angle with the view to set the record straight, debunk, deconstruct and demystify colonial misgivings and conclusions.

6.0 Findings

The data gathered indicate that one needs to master an array of both linguistic and non-linguistic skills in order to become a TL mediator and be able to execute his or her duties comfortably.

6.1 Linguistic skills

Many participants pointed to the fact that mediators are expected to have excellent language skills, including knowledge of the *Bhasukuma* spirit medium language and the ordinary *Kisukuma* language, extensive vocabulary in both languages and fluency in speaking *Kisukuma*, all of which aid the comprehension of the source language message and production of the target language message. As an example, when asked what the attributes of a transcendental language mediator in the *Bhasukuma* TLM setup were, one spirit medium highlighted:

1. *Galiho matono ga mbika na mbika. Aliyo lulu, ishitala kuyimana na kuyishekeelwa imihayo ya kiganga na kukadeebha akayombele kabhakulugenji.* (There are kinds and kinds of skills, but then the important thing is to know and get used to the words of the traditional healing profession and to know the way the ancestors speak).

(Data from interview, MMNKMSG-MZA-07082016)

The response in data 1 above was also corroborated from the mediators' perspective. When asked the same question, one of the *Bhasukuma* spirit medium language mediators had this to say:

2. *Gali mingi, aliyo bhuli nshikilija adakililwe agamane amakulu ga mihayo ya bhakulugenji na witegelej'imbika ja kayombele ka Bhasukuma bha mahanga mahanga na ka bhafumu.* (They are many, but every mediator has to know the meanings of the ancestors' words and has to understand the ways of speaking of the *Bhasukuma* from different communities and of the healers).

(Data from interview, KDNKMSG-MZA-07082016)

To achieve their excellence, the mediators have to constantly work in the traditional medicine field with the spirit mediums as closely as possible. They also have to travel and stay for some time in places other than their native lands to learn other people's cultures and languages or dialects. Working closely with the spirit mediums helps the mediators acquire and expand their vocabulary relating to spirit medium language. Travelling and staying for some time in places other than their native lands help them improve their languages and in paying attention to dialectical variations and to new and evolving vocabulary as their clients come from various dialectical backgrounds.

For presentation convenience, the linguistic skills identified from the data were grouped into two categories: prior-to-the-mediation-process skills and during-the-mediation-process skills. Prior-to-the-mediation-process skills are those skills needed and employed prior to the execution of the mediation process, while during-mediation-process skills are those which are needed and employed during the process of mediating. Table 6.1 provides a summary of the skills. The italicised type indicates *Kisukuma* words as reported by the interviewees. The abbreviation ‘lit.’ stands for literal translation.

Table 6.1 Linguistic skills needed to interpret spirit medium language

No.	Skills category	Specific skills
1.	Prior-to-mediation-process skills	<p>Language mastery skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) <i>Kuyimana na kuyishekeelwa imihayo ya kiganga</i> (lit. to know and get used to the words of the traditional healing profession): Familiarity with magico-religious vocabulary of the <i>Bhasukuma</i> spirit mediums ii) <i>Kukadeebha akayombele kabhakulugenji</i> (lit. to know the way the ancestors speak): General knowledge of the <i>Bhasukuma</i> spirit medium language iii) <i>Bhudula wa kushiyomba chiiza iKisukuma</i> (lit. ability to speak <i>Kisukuma</i> language well): Competence in the ordinary <i>Kisukuma</i> language grammatical rules and principles, ranging from sound system to meaning system iv) <i>Bhusabi wa mihayo ya Kisukuma n'iyakikulugenji</i> (lit. richness in <i>Kisuma</i> and ancestral language words): Extensive vocabulary in both <i>Bhasukuma</i> spirit medium language and <i>Kisukuma</i> language
2.	During-mediation-process skills	<p>(a) Language comprehension skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) <i>Kumana amakulu ga mihayo ya bhakulugenji</i> (understanding the meaning of the ancestors' words): Ability to understand the communicative intention of the ancestral spirit medium message ii) <i>Kweelelwa na kudiliila ilitina lya mhayo</i> (lit. understanding and dealing with the core of what is said): Ability to understand the communicative intention of the original message iii) <i>Kuyukuubilija utubhulungo twa mihayo kuduja kuisanja haalumo na kumana ni mhayo ki gulihayiwa umuyose</i> (lit. to be able to follow word connections in order to relate the words and get wholesome of what is said): Capacity to identify discourse connectors <p>(b) Delivery skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) <i>Kudula kusoomboola muKisukuma amakulu ga mihayo iyilihayiwa</i> (lit. to be able to express in ordinary <i>Kisukuma</i> language the meaning of the source language message): Reformulation ability ii) <i>Kuyomba mingi kiguhi</i> (lit. to speak most of what is being said, but in brief): Ability to apply utterance reduction strategies iii) <i>Kurunguja nuku kongeza mihayo shitange yigololoke iyakuhaya</i> (lit. to omit or add information, provided it gets straight what is said): Ability to adjust the source utterances through explanatory additions and selective omissions iv) <i>Kuteleja lulimi</i> (language fluency, lit. smoothening one's tongue): Ability to speak the target language naturally and

		without or with few grammatical mistakes. v) <i>Kusolanyha chiiza iyakuhaya</i> (lit. to choose nicely what to say): Ability to communicate with good diction
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Source: Field data, 2015-2017

6.2 Non-linguistic skills

Apart from the linguistic skills discussed above, unrelated-to-language skills, but which are as important as the language skills, were also identified by the interviewees. In some literature, the unrelated-to-language skills are called behavioural skills because they do not depend on language, but on practice. These include cognitive skills such as memory capacity. The study participants mentioned such skills as the interpreters' speaking demeanour (e.g. voice quality, gaze directness, tempo and hesitation freeness), comprehension and content remembering ability, and the mind's agility to shape an elegant rendering of a message in the target language. As a case in point, one spirit medium emphasised that mediators are supposed "*kusolanyha shitulo, kubhakujja abhalagulwa na kusobhoola n'imihayo ya mbisila* (to identify main points, to respect clients and to disentangle hidden meanings)". For presentation convenience, these were categorised by the researcher into three main themes: message comprehension skills, recording or memory skills and re-expression skills.

Message comprehension skills pertain to understanding the input or source language message, a new speech input that is presented to the interpreter. This involves paying attention to the aural signal, reasoning and reconstructing the message. After the input message has been comprehended or captured by the interpreter, it is stored or recorded in memory, hence recording or memory skills. While the process of message comprehension continues, the interpreter tries to mentally reformulate the earlier segments of the message into the target language. The earlier segments reformulated mentally are articulated during re-expression. As such, re-expression skills are concerned with delivery or transfer of the message and they are basic to the interpreter's task (Gerver et al., 1989, p. 728). However, delivery is not just delivery, but effective delivery. To transfer messages effectively, the interviewees said that the TL mediators are supposed to have accuracy and message delivery skills. One mediator, for example, pointed to this fact when he responded in an interview that for the mediators to restate accurately what is said, they are supposed "*kuyomba yang'hana dudu; yaya kulembekeja* (to always speak the truth; no lying)". With accuracy, two skills were identified. First, mediators should restate accurately what is said (relying only on short-term memory, because they do not write notes). Secondly, TL mediators are supposed to restate the whole message of everything that was said. While they can disregard the words used in receiving the message, TL mediators are not supposed to omit any part of the message. With message delivery skills, the mediators are expected to speak clearly enough to be easily understood and to speak loudly enough to be easily heard. They are not supposed to speak in low voices or to whisper as the clients may not hear. Table 6.2 summarises the non-linguistic skills needed to interpret spirit medium language of the *Bhasukuma*.

Table 6.2 Non-linguistic skills needed to interpret spirit medium language

No.	Skills category	Specific skills
1.	Comprehension skills	<p>Message reception and reconstruction (analysis & synthesis) skills</p> <p>i) <i>Kuyudegeleka witegelejaga</i> (lit. listening attentively): Ability to concentrate and listen attentively</p> <p>ii) <i>Kuyudegeleka usolanyha ishitulo</i> (lit. listening while identifying points): Ability to listen selectively to be able to identify main points, divide between main and</p>

		<p>secondary ideas, and weed out redundancy</p> <p>iii) <i>Kugeelelwa amafumbo ga kiganga</i> (lit. understanding the mediums' mysterious ways of speaking): Ability to comprehend spirit medium ways of communicating</p> <p>iv) <i>Kuyusolanyha wadiilila imihayo iyabhulongeke</i> (lit. to choose and deal only with the words that matter): Capacity to select and focalise the relevant information</p> <p>v) <i>Kuyugamana amakulu ga mihayo nulu giibisile</i>; (lit. to know the meaning of what is said even when it is hidden): Capacity to deduce meaning through context and extra-linguistic factors</p> <p>vi) <i>Kubinzagula iyoyilhayiwa bhojumalajumula; biya kuloondela kamhayo kamokamo</i> (lit. breaking what is said in general terms; not by following one by one): Ability to chunk information into sense units</p> <p>vii) <i>Kumana mbika na mbika ja makikalile ga bhanhu ba mahanga na mahanga</i> (lit. knowing types and types of different societies' cultures): Possession of good background knowledge, including knowledge of the world and the subject under discussion</p>
2.	Recording or memory skill(s)	<i>Kuleka kwibha</i> (lit. to stop forgetting): Ability to retain information in short term memory and long term memory
3.	Re-expression skills	<p>(a) Accuracy skills</p> <p>i) <i>Kuyutungilija akayombele na kuyulondeja shikong'wa shamushilaka kusudi umhayo gugololoke na amakulu gamaanike</i> (lit. to talk correctly according to voice punctuations so that the message comes straight and the meaning becomes clear): Ability to pitch accurate tone and oral punctuation</p> <p>ii) <i>Kuyomba yang'hana dudu; yaya kulemba nulu kulembekeja</i> (lit. to always speak the truth; no lying): Ability to communicate with accuracy</p> <p>(b) Message delivery skills</p> <p>i) <i>Kuyushookeela ishitulo</i> (lit. repeating the main points): Ability to re-express thoughts clearly and concisely</p> <p>ii) <i>Kugoloola shilaka; ahakuhamuka wahamuka na ahakucheeja wacheeja</i> (lit. straightening one's voice; where one is supposed to shout, one should shout and where to lower [the voice], one should do so): Ability to control one's voice</p> <p>iii) <i>Kuyuhamuka/kuyaaniija na kuyufumbula imihayo; bhiya kuhwehweta</i> (lit. shouting and revealing the words; no whispering): Ability to speak loudly and clearly</p> <p>iv) <i>Kugoloola imihayo; biya kuyushokeelashokeela bulikanza</i> (lit. to be straight to the point and not to be repeating every now and then): Ability to communicate with clear voice projection with less hesitations,</p>

		v) unnecessary repetitions and corrections <i>Kukaangilija kupunguja ukuntindika unyombi</i> (lit. to hurry up in order to reduce possibilities of delaying the speaker): Ability to speed to match the speaker's expectations
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Source: Field data, 2015-2017

Other skills mentioned by the respondents, but which could not fit in the three categories presented in table 6.2, included *bhūjaamu bho kutumama ikanza iliihu ulu giiki bhalihho bhalagulwa bingi* (strength to endure working for long hours in case there are many clients); *ikujo kuli bhabha bhuhemba na ku bhalagulwa* (respect to both the spirit medium and the clients); and *kuleka kubhimva ng'holo* (to control one's emotions).

7.0 Discussion

As it can be observed from the data presented in the previous sections, findings demonstrate that there is an array of linguistic and non-linguistic skills required for the TLM interpreters to master such as knowledge of the languages involved as captured in data 1, traditional medicine subject area knowledge, ability to understand the invariant core of the source message as well as ability to identify discourse connectors as captured in table 6.1 [1(i), (iii)-(iv) & 2(a)(i)-(iii)]. These skills are not limited to TLM as they are not so much different from the mainstream interpreting conducted in conferences, courtrooms and in education settings, to name but a few settings. For instance, any interpreting enterprise is primarily a matter of comprehending an incoming message, without which a semantically and pragmatically coherent reproduction of the message in the target language would be bound not to happen.

There seems to be a general consensus among interpreting scholars that the abilities and personal qualities required of interpreters, as highlighted in section 3.0, include linguistic self-confidence or command of the source and target languages, mental rapidity, broad general culture, good memory, expressive ability, physical and psychological stamina, and ability to work in a team; and emotional stability, motivation and domain-general cognitive abilities and flexibility, *inter alia* (Bontempo & Napier, 2015; Macnamara et al., 2015; Russo, 2015; Timarova & Salaets, 2015; Zannirato, 2013). As one can see from the data, TLM shares these skills with the mainstream interpreting. Why then is TLM invisible in the interpreting landscape and discourse? The answer to this question can be twofold. First, the question can be approached from postcoloniality and scriptocentric theoretical perspectives. Secondly, it can be approached from the interpreting field's historical background.

From a postcoloniality perspective, the Western powers reinforced and have continued to reinforce the perceptions of them being a world dominant power (Boehmer, 2005, p. 1). Imperialists have been cherishing an unambiguously heroic image of themselves as conquerors and civilisers of the world. For instance, "Where the British established a cross, a city or colony, they proclaimed the start of a new history. Other histories ... were declared of lesser significance or ... non-existent" (Boehmer, 2005, p. 24). These declarations have also been reinforced by scriptocentrism, which regards as credible, scientific and intellectual only that knowledge which is created on the basis of Western procedures and standards and disseminated in writings; those who cannot read and write are seen in the eyes of the West as ignorant, illiterate, barbaric and headless masses, *inter alia*. Given that African realities are largely oral, they are seen as not up to the standards. This 'othering' continues to date. It is, therefore, not surprising to learn that, although they more or less share interpretation skills and competencies with the mainstream interpreting conducted in conferences, courtrooms and in education settings, *inter alia*, traditional

forms of interpreting such as TLM are not regarded as interpreting or sub-forms thereof; they are either considered as non-existent or something of lesser significance.

It is interesting to note that the 'othering' is not a phenomenon limited to African indigenous forms of interpreting; it also has at some point in history been raised by the Westerners with reference to community interpreting. Garbe (2000, p. 11), for example, points out that, "For many, and particularly for the community of professional conference interpreters, the label 'community interpreter' identifies someone *who is less than a qualified interpreter*" (emphasis added). This sentiment is also shared by Garzone and Viezzi (2002) who indicate that from the outset, it has been the traditional focus of the interpreting discipline to consider conference interpreting as the only type of interpreting and to relegate other types as if were less important. "Interpreting in non-conference settings—liaison interpreting, escort interpreting, business interpreting, court interpreting etc.—had always existed, but had traditionally accounted for only a fraction of the total volume of ... interpreting services..." as they were simply considered poor relations to conference interpreting (Garzone & Viezzi, 2002, p. 5). Hence, they were "thought to deserve neither specialist training nor specific research work" (Garzone & Viezzi, 2002, p. 5). This is possibly why indigenous forms of interpreting have not gained much visibility. The reasons attributed to this state of affairs are in line with scriptocentric perspective.

The first reason revolves around the historical background of the field, the difference in traditions from which community interpreting as well as TLM and other forms of interpreting arose. TLM and community interpreting arose "from a completely different tradition than conference and diplomatic interpreting," which is social justice and equity (Garbe, 2000, p. 13). TLM and community interpreting developed from "the recognition that many individuals are deprived of access to services to which they are entitled, because they do not speak the language of the institution or the service provider" (Garbe, 2000, p. 13). This entails an element of remediation, which is never part of conference interpreting. Secondly, most community and TLM interpreting practitioners come from a different background as opposed to conference and diplomatic interpreters. They rarely have formal education in interpreting.

The third reason is that there is practically no place to study TLM and community interpreting in the classroom setting and that "there has been little research on this activity, and a body of knowledge has been slow to develop" (Garbe, 2000, p. 13). Consequently, many people have not been exposed to this type of interpreting and are not aware of what it is and what it entails. Garbe (2000, p. 14) suspects that it may be because there are so few people who are able to earn a living as community interpreters to warrant any serious training and research. To TLM, this implies that until there are more full-time practitioners and a community of Western-educated scholars and teachers, the TLM community is bound to continue struggling with the question of identity and visibility for a long time; hence, the quest of the present study to intellectualise this African cultural resource.

8.0 Conclusion

Given that the abilities and personal qualities required of TLM interpreters are not so much different from mainstream interpreting, it is justifiable to conclude that, despite its invisibility in interpreting research landscape and discourse, TLM is truly interpreting. The present study, therefore, proves that orality is not the point of weakness. Rather, it is just a matter of perspective in question. The present paper calls for mindset change for promotion of African and non-African oral realities to fully harness their potentials. African scholars, therefore, should work tirelessly to expose these realities to the world to help people better their understanding.

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