How can we communicate in a multilingual society?

The role of translation policies and mediated intercultural communication.

The case of Chile

This article's title starts with the following question: how can we communicate in a multilingual society? This question brings up the idea that we should consider our own realities: what happens to people who arrive to our country and do not know the local language? What happens to us when we are somewhere, and we cannot speak the main language? How do we manage to establish communicative bridges in such situations? Some of the solutions that have been proposed in different societies to tackle such communication issues are related to translation and interpreting. Throughout this article, we discuss with greater detail the translation policies that are generated in multilingual contexts and how these materialise in mediated intercultural communication initiatives. To this end, we will provide examples from the Chilean context, which is the one we study in depth.

We will briefly refer to the linguistic situation in Chile, so that we can situate and describe the context in which the translation policies and mediated communication activities referred to in this article are generated.

Firstly, it has to be highlighted that the official language *de facto* in Chile is Spanish. This means that all government documentation and legislation, as well as communications between the state and its citizens, are in Spanish, even if there is no reference in the legislation to the official status of this language (Zajícová 2017, p. 179).

However, Spanish is not the only language spoken in Chile. The presence of different native peoples broadens the spectrum of languages and cultures that coexist in the territory. In fact, already at the legislative level, the Ley Indígena 19.235, created in 1993, recognizes the rights of native peoples to use and maintain their own languages, both in the private and public sphere (Díaz-Galaz 2017, p. 52). Likewise, the ratification of ILO's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (1989) promotes the maintenance and strengthening of their identities, languages and religions, within the framework of the states in which they live (2006, p. 58).

In addition, during the recent years, the profile of the migratory flow that arrives to Chile has changed. Traditionally, the country has constantly received people from Latin America who are Spanish speakers. Peruvians, Argentines, Bolivians, Colombians and Ecuadorians are the most common nationalities. However, since 2010, Chile has seen the arrival of people from Haiti, who have a first language other than Spanish: Haitian Creole. According to the 2017 census, international migrants account for 4.4% of Chile's population, with Haitians accounting for 8.4% (INE 2018).

The arrival of Haitians, which has experienced an exponential increase since 2014 (Rojas 2016; IPPDH 2017), has created communication barriers, especially at the public services level. And this has contributed to the appearance of different translation policies and initiatives that seek to establish this communication.

But what are translation policies? Within Translation Studies, the concept "translation policy" has had different meanings and nuances (Meylaerts 2011). In this text, we will understand it as a series of decisions made by stakeholders in the public sphere and, on some occasions, in the private sphere, to solve collective problems regarding language and translation (Meylaerts and González Núñez 2017). Although this definition is quite broad, it allows us to refer to the idea that translation policies involve making decisions regarding translation and interpreting activities.

In order to analyse them from a practical point of view, González Núñez proposes to work with translation policies based on three interrelated and mutually influencing constituents: practice, ideology and translation management (2016, p. 7-8). Practices correspond to specific translation and interpretation activities, for example, the translation of a book or the interpreting service done by an interpreter in a court hearing. Ideologies are the beliefs that a community has with regard to translation, for example, considering that interpreting activities allow people who do not know the local language to be integrated into society. Finally, management refers to decisions made by a given authority with regard to translation activities, for example, whether a school principal decides to incorporate interpreters to

mediate communication between teachers and parents who do not speak the language of the host country.

We can observe an example of these three constituents of translation policies at the Catholic University of Temuco (Universidad Católica de Temuco or UCT). This university is located at the city of Temuco in southern Chile, where part of the population is native Mapuche people. In 2016, as a result of the UCT Improvement Plan, led by the Academic Vice-Rector's Office, it was decided to translate the university's signage (information boards, place names, etc.) into Mapudungun - the language spoken by the Mapuche people. In an interview, the rector of the UCT pointed out that, with that practice, "our Institution points towards the implementation of cultural and intercultural practices that encourage integration in order to overcome situations of discrimination, disparity and inequity caused by monocultural practices" (UCT implemented bilingual signage in all its campuses, 2016).

In this case, we can see that the translation practice is having the same bilingual signage in both Spanish and Mapudungun. The management of translation corresponds to the Academic Vice-Rector's Office, who made the decision of carrying out the translation of that information. Finally, the ideology of translation is the belief that the Mapudungun-Spanish translation is a way to integrate the Mapuche culture and avoid situations of discrimination.

There is another element that defines translation policies: the way they are created. Theoretically speaking, translation policies can emerge from the top (top-down) or from the bottom (bottom-up). In the situation where translation policy is top-down, a regulation concerning translation activities is created and enacted. This is the case of Chile and the ratification of ILO Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries. This states that "Measures shall be taken to ensure that members of these peoples can understand and be understood in legal proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other effective means" (ILO 2006, p. 33). In Chile, to implement this, Mapuche intercultural facilitators (known in Spanish as "facilitadores culturales") have been implemented to assist in linguistic and cultural issues in legal proceedings (Le Bonniec et al. 2018-2019).

If the translation policy is bottom-up, generated translation practices are not regulated at the management level. In Chile, it is common to observe this type of translation policy when hiring intercultural facilitators from Haiti. These intercultural facilitators are hired in education centres where this group is numerous, so that they can facilitate linguistic and cultural communication. Such a measure is taken by school principals themselves and the Ministry of Education has no regulations nor protocols for working with them.

Actually, it is important to note that, both top-down and bottom-up translation policies are complementary in the development of translation policies. As we have already outlined in the previous paragraphs, translation policies can materialize in the presence of professionals in mediated intercultural communication (Arumí 2017). With this term we refer to the person that allows the communication mediation between two people who have different languages and cultures. In particular, we can observe this type of professionals in public services, such as education, justice or health.

In Chile, people who perform this task have different names and may also assume more functions depending on the centre for which they work, in addition to those involving translation and interpreting services. Some of the names that have been researched are *traductor* (translator)*, facilitador lingüístico* (linguistic facilitator)*, facilitador cultural* (cultural facilitator) –a term originating from the interaction with native groups–*, co-profesor* (coteacher) or *co-médico* (codoctor)*,* among others.

Generally, professionals in mediated intercultural communication play essential roles in integrating groups that do not know the local language into the scope of public services. First of all, this figure allows to achieve an effective communication between the speakers, corresponding to the service providers and the users, whether they are migrants or people from native linguistic minorities. We understand effective communication as "the right of each individual to understand and be understood in situations where they must interact with public institutions" (García-Beyaert 2008, p. 3). Such effective communication implies, at the same time, the management of cultural barriers that may arise between both speakers.

Secondly, professionals in mediated intercultural communication provide complete and quality access to public services, since users can take part in the interaction and understand what is happening, whether it is a doctor's appointment, a parent-teacher meeting, a trial, etc. We only have to think about to what extent a doctor's appointment is affected if the doctor and the patient cannot communicate: the user cannot explain what he or she is feeling, the doctor has difficulties making a diagnosis and, as a result, deciding a treatment and following it up becomes much more complex.

We interviewed a health professional who works closely with Haitian users. He highlighted the key role that intercultural facilitators play as part of a doctor's appointment. For him, their role is very important:

> "At the end of the day it is like a live dictionary that translates everything for you and allows you to give information [to the Haitian user] and get the information you need. The result of all this is that the person gets clearer information, is better understood, has more background and is able to deal with the situation in a more appropriate way. [translated from Spanish]

Thus, the service provider is aware of the roles played by professionals in mediated intercultural communication: they allow for effective communication and enable quality access to healthcare, which leads to the delivering the right treatment.

As we have mentioned at the beginning of this article, multilingual societies have given different solutions to communication needs generated with linguistic minorities. In this global scenario, Ozolins (2000) proposes a spectrum in which the different types of solutions that countries can give to communication needs are listed. This spectrum is a continuum that covers the following phases:

(1) Denial phase: A phase in which there is no response from the host country to communication problems. At this stage, it is the user who must find an interpreter if necessary, which forces him to contact family members or friends.

(2) Ad hoc solutions phase: This phase takes place mainly in countries with recent migratory waves, and therefore generates ad hoc solutions to overcome language barriers. These measures are led by a specific institution or centre and emerge as a temporary response, which is why bilingual people without professional training are often used.

(3) Genetic language services phase: This phase involves, in a more in-depth way, governmental and private institutions, to take charge of the provision of interpreting services in public institutions.

(4) Global solutions phase: In this phase, generic language services are developed in an official and professional manner, with the participation of both governmental and private institutions. In this phase, the training of interpreters and translators is also arranged, and accreditation procedures are created.

(5) Legal phase: This is an optional phase and occurs mainly in countries where efforts are made to include the use of interpreters in the legislation in instances where users require them.

In the case of Chile, for example, we observe that the country is in a phase of ad hoc solutions, at least as far as the Haitian collective is concerned, since the provision of translation and interpreting services is led by particular centres or institutions, especially those that receive the greatest number of users from Haiti. Furthermore, the solutions to solve communication needs in Chile have been diverse and include, in addition to translation and interpreting services, other types of initiatives:

- Translating documents: forms, brochures, posters, etc.
- Teaching Haitian Creole and Haitian culture to service providers.
- Teaching Spanish to the Haitian collective.
- Hiring Haitian professionals in the public services, namely, bilingual staff to work in several areas.

Although all these initiatives are aimed at providing a solution to the communication needs that have been generated with Haitian migrants, it should be noted that some of them are more effective than others. On the other hand, these are complementary measures (Pym, 2012), as is the case with Spanish classes for Haitians and the presence of intercultural facilitators in public services, since both promote effective communication and the integration of the Haitian community.

Final conclusions

To sum up, in line with what we have discussed throughout this article, we will return to the importance of translation policies and mediated intercultural communication initiatives, as a response to the ways in which we communicate in multilingual societies.

Translation policies, in the first place, provide a framework to develop consistent and homogeneous translation initiatives in a region, in other words, that all people living in the same area can have access to the same translation and interpreting services, without having to go to a specific centre.

In the second place, guidelines are given on how to proceed in particular cases where there are communication barriers. For example, if a person who does not know the local language has to go to court, a translation policy regulated at the legislative level will make it possible to provide him or her with an interpreter so that he or she can understand and be understood throughout the process. Finally, as we pointed out earlier, translation policies enable the integration of linguistic minorities in the host country.

With regard to mediated intercultural communication, the first point we want to underline is that it makes it possible to implement the right to effective communication in public services. Furthermore, it allows people to have access to a complete and quality service that is equal to the access that have the rest of the population that does speak the local language. This type of communication also safeguards rights such as access to health and education, since it makes it possible for people from linguistic minorities to access the service.

Finally, mediated intercultural communication enables the delivery of a more effective service: this leads to cost reductions, improvement in the delivery of services (e.g. more accurate diagnoses) and better use of the service by users (e.g. treatment follow-up).

In short, we believe that in order to communicate in a multilingual society, translation and interpreting cannot be overlooked. This necessarily implies the creation of translation policies that govern these types of activities and the implementation of interpreters in public services. At the same time, it is important to complete this type of initiative with others that ensure the integration of linguistic minorities into the public sphere, such as local language teaching.

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