INTRODUCTION

In the wake of Foucault, academic papers generally no longer focus on defining the ontological statute of their objects of study; in other words, they do not proceed on the basis of a definition that predetermines what the specific field of knowledge *is*. On the contrary, researchers now tend to focus on the way in which their own *practices* take shape in a given spatial or temporal context. From this point of view, Public Service Interpreting can be viewed not as a normative discipline in which a particular way of acting is pre-established according to a defined set of *a priori* rules, but rather as an exercise in which a particular unit of knowledge is applied in relation to adjacent practices.

Hence the interest of framing translation practices within the cultural context. Having said that, however, we wish to make it clear from the outset that in proposing PSI as an intercultural mediation exercise, our objective in this monographic study is not to focus on the bridges that translation builds between cultures by endeavouring to make their respective points of view mutually understandable. Cultures are symbolic constructs, and their symbols are above all articulated through language. And although the interpreter often finds him or herself in the demanding situation of closing the gap between different cultural viewpoints by translating the words in which they are expressed, we do not wish here to use the term "intercultural" in a broad sense, since it would require us to pay particular attention to mediation practices designed to facilitate the processes of negotiation in community-based conflicts. We do not use the term "culture" in its ethnographic or ethnological sense, which deals with the comparative study of the identity patterns expressing differences between peoples, nor in its broader anthropological sense, focusing on the scientific observation of the human being as a whole. In almost "functionalist" terms, when discussing intercultural mediation, we shall refer to the deceptively simple fact that the public services interpreter is literally *in the middle* of different social groups who identify themselves by following patterns of behaviour which are often very firmly established or even conform to certain institutionally defined protocols. Consequently, interpreters find themselves in the position of having to adapt the way they work to a cultural "ecosystem" defined by reactions, values, ideological and behavioural models which, in relation to other groups, other members of their own group or themselves, bring into play the members of the social groups involved in the interpreting practices.

To return to the above-mentioned propositions, it is in those very practices arising from the exercise of public service interpreting that the cultural norms inherent to the behaviour of the groups and agents involved —be they interpreters or those who use their services— can become an object of study and field of

knowledge. Judges, doctors, police officers, lawyers, social workers... and victims, witnesses, declarants and agents in general, do not have a previously established set of rules to regulate their behaviour in the situations defined by the translation activities. Rather, those practices influence the "norms" of behaviour, which, far from being subjective or idiosyncratic, conform to observable patterns informed by the cultural characteristics of the groups involved. Our aim is to find out how translation practices take shape in the midst of professional cultures that are made explicit through being exercised.

Translation practices in the context of public service translating not only transfer equivalent contents from one language to another, but at the same time they mediate between institutions, collectives, corporate habits, regulations, administrative measures and utterances; between specific direct limitations which may have existed before the practices, on the one hand, and indirect pressures which dictate behaviours during the exercise of those practices. They also mediate in situations in which not only interests, but also values and beliefs, come into conflict in communicative situations that are far from horizontal. In this monographic work, therefore, we shall study interpreting by looking at different professionals working in different contexts and from different theoretical perspectives, considering their practices as the field in which the inertias and tensions determining their exercise are articulated.

This monograph contains various articles which, from a variety of theoretical perspectives and frameworks, show the importance of discursive practices in establishing the interpreter's professional identity, his or her recognition, society's expectations regarding the interpreter's professional activity, and the public perception of the social need for the linguistic services provided and the priority given to them in public policies. This latter aspect is discussed by García-Beyaert, who emphasises and appeals to the responsibility of States and public authorities in providing interpreting services. Government intervention would ensure professional regulation, the development of the necessary infrastructures for interpreting services to be carried out, and the sustainability of the system. However, in order for such a commitment to come about, the author considers that it is essential for the so-called institutional "agenda setting" to be changed in such a way as to make the provision of language assistance services a priority. According to the author, this prioritisation requires a reformulation of the problem of language assistance to present it as a basic right of vulnerable sections of society, rather than an action in defence of linguistic diversity; in other words, the problem needs to be addressed more from the communication point of view than from the perspective of linguistic difference. By emphasising the value of shared human dignity as opposed to difference, such a focus stands to benefit all the interested parties, not just the users.

According to Martín Ruano, the present institutional subordination and scant recognition of the role and practice of PSI is a consequence, among other factors, of the internalisation on the part of interpreters of the normative discourse that defines their role. In her article, she uses Foucault's concept of power to shed light on the reasons explaining the pragmatic construction of the interpreter's role, the definition of his/her relationship to the other agents involved, and the creation of the latter's expectations concerning the interpreter's role. Within these parameters, the

author discusses the need to propose new and more assertive definitions regarding the professional profiles of the agents involved in translation practice, and the need to build and effectively negotiate new subjectivities.

In an attempt to redefine the landscape in which the roles of the respective agents in translation acts take shape, the research carried out by Jiqing Dong sets out to study the discursive practices which determine the weft and warp of professional practice in a new organisational context: a social interpreting services company directed and managed by interpreters themselves. The current neoliberal agenda of many governments has promoted the outsourcing of interpreting services (for example, in court interpreting in the United Kingdom), which, on a commercial level, has resulted in the deregulation of the market and, in labour terms, a change in the professional code, working conditions and autonomy of interpreters. In this context, the author examines and highlights the transformative potential of the discourse used by translation company executives —based on the discourse of the directors of the company she studied— in their conceptualization of the interpreter's professional identity, making a case for the interpreter's social role in the interests of the community, independently of a purely business or lucrative point of view.

The diverse factors that determine interpreters' professional development and the pragmatic definition of their function have also been studied by Baixauli-Olmos and Aguirre and Roca. Baixauli-Olmos offers a description of the professional role and identity of public service interpreters working in prisons and correctional institutions, an environment which shapes the institutional, ethical and cultural considerations determining their activity. Taking as his starting point a socio-ecological model developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), he identifies balancing and unbalancing factors and variables which affect the role of interpreters working in correctional institutions, their social and occupational profile, and the evolution of their role. By observing the complex and changing nature of interpreters' actions in interactions within a set of systems, the author describes their efforts to achieve a contextually and ecologically balanced equilibrium.

Roca and Aguirre's novel point of view challenges the traditional notion of the interpreter's role, advocating the need to introduce new perspectives into the debate. The authors examine the interrelationship between the interpreter's degree of mediation, his/her role and the pragmatic concept of social distance, both from a theoretical point of view and in its application to dialogue interpreting and its implications for the negotiation of his/her function. The authors observe the position of the interpreters relative to the interlocutors and the mediation strategies used, as well as their relation to the various degrees of familiarity and hierarchisation in the communicative situation.

In the specific case of telephone interpreting, the distance (in this case physical) between the participants in the communicative encounter makes it necessary to follow a series of protocols dictated by the use of the telephone as an instrumental channel which helps to compensate for the physical absence of the interpreter. This requirement also necessitates on the part of the interpreter a range of skills specific to this mode of translation. Fernández Perez's article focuses on the skills required by the interpreter to fulfil his/her role as the coordinator of the participants' turn-

taking, according to Wadensjö (1998). The author discusses four skills which she considers to be the most influential when it comes to managing interaction in the telephone interpreting mode and which most clearly set it apart from on-site dialogue interpreting: managing the beginning of the encounter, managing turn-taking, non-renditions and the interpreter's own interventions, and managing the end of the encounter.

The articles by Tipton and Vargas-Urpí study and present practices of the agents involved in the translation acts and the ways in which they apply their protocols as determining factors when defining the role and practice of interpreters. Tipton's study analyzes interpreters' perceptions of police interviews involving victims of domestic abuse with limited language proficiency. From the point of view of risk assessment and management, key elements in this type of communicative situations highlight the lack of a regulatory framework for police interventions and the gaps in institutional knowledge regarding interpreter mediation. The author postulates the need for co-responsibility between agents and interpreters during the encounter, not with a view to changing the interpreter's role and position, but to co-manage risk in the interactions.

The hypothetical triangular communication, defined as an equilateral situation relying on the interpreter's impartiality and invisibility, is revealed as much more complex in the work of Vargas-Urpí, in which she analyses the interaction of judicial agents in criminal proceedings when interpreting is required for the defendant or the witness. Specifically, Vargas-Urpí shows how the style of judges and lawyers, as well as the management of the conversation beyond the existing recommendations on working with interpreters, influences the way the interpreters perform their duties and poses problems of both a textual and interactional nature.

Finally, the aim of the diachronic historical study carried out by Estévez Grossi is to reconstruct, on the basis of oral testimonies, the communicative situation of migrant workers from Galicia (Spain) in Hanover (Germany) in the 1960s and 1970s and their need for community interpreting. In her article, the author puts forward a methodological proposal for the study of oral history as a means of retrieving the voices of participants in mediated encounters and thereby gaining insight into the practices and norms which obtained in the provision of interpreters to emigrant communities during that episode of our past.

We hope that a close reading of the following articles will contribute to the awareness that a description of real cultural patterns (what actually happens) can only be defined in dialectic relation to ideal patterns (what could or should happen), and that the model of truth proposed by academic research will be determined by the practices that it observes, while at the same time it normalises the observance of the practices that it defines.