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Roundtable: feminist interpreting (studies) – the story so far

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Editor’s introduction

This debate arose from my interest in translation and interpreting practices within maternal healthcare viewed from an ethical and feminist perspective, with a particular focus on advocacy. During the literature review, it quickly became obvious to me that, compared to feminist translation, research on feminist interpreting is scarce. My curiosity to find out what has been done in the field led me to reach out to colleagues with the relevant experience and to organise this roundtable discussion. The fact that I am not an interpreting studies scholar – despite having worked as an interpreter in the past – but a translation studies one with extensive experience in feminist frameworks enabled me to pose some provocative questions. I am very grateful to the colleagues who responded to my call for this discussion that we first carried out synchronously online. The result is a collaborative, polyphonic debate, which we hope will contribute to discussions of ethics in interpreting, attract attention to existing feminist interpreting practices and pave the way for a feminist interpreting studies.

Şebnem Susam-Saraeva

Thank you all for being here and contributing to our debate on feminist interpreting practices and research. I want to start the discussion by focusing on the different trajectories translation and interpreting studies have taken regarding feminism. For about three decades we have had a solid sub-discipline we refer to as “feminist translation studies” but nothing of the sort in interpreting studies. There are, of course, feminist interpreters and contexts where feminist interpreting does take place; yet nobody refers to a “feminist interpreting studies”. What may be the reasons behind this?
Flor Montero

I guess it has to do with the nature of the beast, of the thing we do here. Usually, people who can afford interpreting are those who are in power; and those in power want to keep the status quo. Also, the rules of interpreting were set by AIIC (International Association of Conference Interpreters), mostly by male interpreters at the time, and these rules stuck. The notions that you must be neutral, invisible and robotic, that you should show no emotions, those are very masculine notions, imposed by those first leaders, but they are still around, haunting us. We are not supposed to have our own voice, our own opinion, or show any type of emotion, which comes at a price. As a psychotherapist who specialises in trauma, I can say that this is precisely the kind of thing that can predispose you to vicarious trauma. To recap, it has to do with all of it: the people who can afford our services, the people who set the rules, the beliefs we have around how an interpreter should act. All this makes it exceedingly difficult for us to take a stand. For instance, I have a colleague who was interpreting and the speaker said something quite sexist. So she decided to say to the microphone: “The interpreter refuses to repeat those misogynistic words”, and then she turned it off. The male interpreter, who was next to her, grabbed the microphone and continued interpreting. Her act of defiance was very quickly silenced by another man. If we are to have our own response, this is the type of challenge we face. I nevertheless believe this should be the way we act; but for that, we would need to question the status quo and the rules of the game around interpreting.

Gabriela Yañez

This has a lot to do with interpreter training. What happens with training, at least in conference interpreting, is that a lot of the theory revolves around the théorie du sens (theory of sense or interpretive theory of the Paris School). The teaching focus remains on techniques to interpret and the cognitive processes we go through as interpreters. At least in Argentina, training is devoted to acquiring the skills needed to become proficient in consecutive or simultaneous interpreting, or sight translation, to the detriment of discussions on context and social factors.

Olga García-Caro

I agree with your thoughts about training. The issue we have in Australia with community interpreting revolves more around the fact that the interpreting field is not homogenous in terms of training and certification (González 2019). Although the country has an established and comprehensive language services system, it was not until four years ago that pre-service training became compulsory. So education and training these days can be very well informed by current social issues and research, but only recently-graduated interpreters would have benefited from this type of learning. I now have students working on various issues related to interpreting, such as ideology, gender, domestic violence, LGBTQ+ communities and language, politics or climate change. A great number of community interpreters, however, have not had the opportunity to complete tertiary interpreter education, meaning that important components of training, other than skills-
based ones, are lacking in the field. I see this with students who are already practising community interpreters but who come to us to complete formal studies: an entire new world opens up before them when they undertake these courses. They discover completely new approaches to and understandings of their role and other ethical considerations, which in turn have different implications across settings and specialisations. This is a marked improvement on the previous curriculum. As recently as a decade ago ethics courses were still based solely on the endorsed code of ethics.¹ The students were expected to be familiar with the codes but did not necessarily learn how to interpret or apply them. Similarly, interpreting courses were centred on practising techniques and skills; little attention was given to contextual knowledge. These days we provide the students with tools to approach and resolve ethical dilemmas arising in interpreting situations. Students know that without understanding the setting, the people involved and the broader social issues, they cannot provide quality interpreting services. For example, my area of specialisation, interpreting in service settings dealing with domestic violence – the only exposure students gained to this topic in the past was if the course included relevant material used for skills practice, such as audio recordings or texts for sight translation. Now, all the interpreting courses I coordinate not only include practice material but also full modules providing contextual knowledge related to domestic violence and sexual assault. Among the topics covered are: gender inequality, underpinning philosophies, intersectionality, dynamics and patterns of abuse, the impact of domestic violence, what the different response services do and how interpreters play a crucial role in ensuring victims’ access to services and perpetrator accountability.

Luciana Carvalho Fonseca

In my experience as an interpreter trainer, the curricula of all the courses I was involved with were also very much skills-based. Occasions in which social issues were addressed and discussed depended on the choice of texts, recordings and videos by the instructor. Whether we could get political about the activity would really depend on who the teacher was. Interpreting studies as a field has not paid much attention to political and feminist issues in terms of education and training, or to gender in general. This was illustrated by the work of an undergraduate student of mine at the University of São Paulo, Paloma Freire (2021). She wanted to investigate how female and male interpreters were evaluated differently in quality assessment. She started by carrying out a review of work on quality assessment in interpreting studies, which we know is abundant because people have been studying quality in interpreting for decades. She found out that about 40% of the studies in her literature review did not include information on the gender of participants/interpreters, and those that did, disregarded gender as an analytical category in the discussion of assessment. In short, not only did many of the selected papers fail to provide information on the gender of interpreters in quality assessment studies, but they also ignored the gender of assessors and judges. Therefore, despite the sizeable number of studies on quality assessment, we have no evidence in interpreting studies of whether different genders assess or are assessed differently, while there is an abundance of sociological studies showing that women suffer from negative, gender-biased feedback in professional settings. This “genderless” background of interpreting studies really strikes me when we speak of feminist interpreting. Interpreting studies has yet to address gender in a consistent and fully-fledged way.
Olga García-Caro

Indeed, there is a lack of representation of gender in interpreting studies. Only recently have some discussions of the benefits of conducting more gender-inclusive research in interpreting studies come to light (Marey-Castro and Del Pozo Triviño 2020). What is not represented in research does not exist.

Gabriela Yañez

While reviewing the limited literature on interpreting studies and gender, what stands out is that a lot of attention is paid to the gender of interpreters and the kind of linguistic devices or mechanisms they put into practice depending on whether they are male or female. For example, it has been identified that women interpreters use more hedges compared to men. But there is not much research on socio-political issues, such as the impact of what is interpreted how discourses are manipulated, the interventions interpreters can make to advance an agenda of feminism and gender in order to achieve gender equity (see Yañez forthcoming).

Luciana Carvalho Fonseca

And the studies that do address gender often make no reference whatsoever to feminism. This has been pointed out by Olga Castro and Emek Ergun in Feminist Translation Studies (2017, 2–3): the avoidance of the words “feminism” or “feminist” in the discipline. Instead, many translation scholars produce work using gender, women and other terms that euphemise the political.

Gabriela Yañez

Yes, but compared to feminist translation studies, we are still lagging behind, because while translation studies is looking at different gender identities, interpreting studies is still stuck in the binary. There is no problematising or delving into what happens with other gender identities beyond the male and female.

Carmen Acosta Vicente

For my doctoral research, I have been working on a meta-synthesis on gender in interpreting studies and how gender is dealt with in some of the most well-known translation and interpreting journals. The literature on gender in interpreting is very limited and indeed usually oriented to a binary understanding. There is often a focus on gender differences in interpreting output, as Gabriela mentioned, on the interpreter’s use of language, etc. but not much problematising of other matters. When we think about it, feminist translation studies was initially boosted by literary translation, since it provided so many creative and political possibilities. However, interpreting – both public service interpreting and conference interpreting – is tightly linked to institutions and the boundaries that come with them.
**Flor Montero**

It is also a matter of the time we have to process things. Translators have more time to stop, think and reflect. We do not have that luxury.

**Carmen Acosta Vicente**

That is a good point. I was also thinking that these institutions where interpreting takes place – healthcare centres, courts, immigration offices, etc. – try to present themselves as neutral and unbiased. In a way, they convey professionalism and fairness through their neutrality. Therefore, when institutions bring an interpreter into their context and premises, they expect the interpreter to abide by the same standards of neutrality, whether or not this is possible, helpful or desirable. In my opinion, these limitations and expectations pose some barriers to interpreting studies taking a feminist turn.

**Şebnem Susam-Saraeva**

I agree that it all started with literary translation, but feminist frameworks and methodologies are now applied to many different areas of translation studies, so it spreads as people find encouragement and ideas. Within translation studies, feminist discussions started in the same way: it was all about how male and female translators translate, whether they display marked stylistic differences, etc. Then people realised they should really be talking about other gender-related issues. So maybe interpreting studies is doing the same, just dealing with these initial questions, and then opening up to wider political issues.

**Luciana Carvalho Fonseca**

We should at this stage point out researchers who have been using the word feminist, and the term interpretación feminista (“feminist interpreting”). This is the case of Cristina Marey-Castro and Maribel Del Pozo Triviño (2020), whose work is noteworthy because they argue for a feminist interpreter-training, as well as pointing to the need for a decolonial perspective in interpreter education. Additionally, María Isabel Abril Marti (2015) explicitly mentions the need for a gender perspective in interpreter training, highlighting the lack of education for interpreters working in the context of gender-based violence. The work of these researchers is set in the context of gender-based violence in institutional settings in Spain. Institutional settings can be extremely oppressive, but at the same time they seek to convey an aura of neutrality and objectivity, thus obscuring their own ideology. However, as feminists, we know only too well that neutrality and objectivity ensue from a universalising – capitalist and patriarchal – ideology that by default results in the oppression of women. These issues have been the main motivation of my current research on feminist and decolonial interpreting for migrant women.

**Olga García-Caro**

There is indeed reluctance to reference feminism in our field. As Sandra Hale pointed out (2007, 204), it is actually quite rare that researchers state their conceptual and theoretical
approaches in community interpreting studies. My current research is explicitly feminist (García-Caro forthcoming). In the early stages of the literature review, I was unable to find any feminist work done in interpreting studies. When Caroline Norma and I highlighted the need for feminist interpreter-education (2016), it was difficult to find any reference to similar works. I align my approach with critical interpreting as explored in Julie Boéri and Carol Maier’s collection (2010) Compromiso Social y Traducción/Interpretación – Translation/Interpreting and Social Activism, which focuses on how interpreters make an impact on society and how our field can work to change unjust systems, while presenting new paradigms for training, education, ethics and research. However, although these views aim at listening to society and working with social groups to create a completely new way of interpreting and changing the world, in this volume feminist work is presented again only in relation to translation and not to interpreting.2

Şebnem Susam-Saraeva

We briefly touched upon the next question when we noted how much time interpreters have to process, compared to translators. How does the different medium involved, written or oral, impact upon ethical stances in terms of feminism?

Flor Montero

First of all, face-to-face interaction is very different. It is much more difficult to question people to their faces or through a microphone in a booth. When translating, you do not get that immediate reaction. It is like with social media: the things you say online are often much bolder than those you would say face-to-face. Then there is also this shadow that accompanies our profession: traduttore, traditore [translator, traitor]. Translators are considered to be betraying the language, always. All this culture that hates subtitles and dubbing for instance, because it is not the “original”. So perhaps, we do not want to add another layer to this animosity the audiences already feel towards our work. Because if you bring in the feminist perspective to your interpreting, you are adding an extra layer of possible conflict. This might probably be a subconscious reluctance; it is all the more powerful because it is not recognised.

Luciana Carvalho Fonseca

When I heard this question, what immediately came to my mind was James Holmes’s map of translation studies (1988). Holmes was not concerned with interpreting, therefore he put it under medium-restricted translation. Translation categorised as oral or written within this framework is today, after so many years, considered very limiting, because interpreting is not only oral, but also visual-spatial, as in sign language interpreting. So when we are asked about the different media involved in translation and interpreting, we should not forgo interpreting activities that cannot be labelled as either written or oral. In addition to the medium, there are other constraints to interpreting that relate to ethical stances. One of them is the immediacy factor that affects written, oral and visual-spatial translation differently. Immediacy will also affect
contextual cues and is the reason why, for example, it is so difficult to reuse interpreted recording without the video. Because interpreting is here and now, in addition to being immediate, it is also ephemeral. Technology has obviously changed this to a great extent, but in-person interaction is still ephemeral if not recorded. In terms of the ethical stance, it is worth noting that interpreting takes place among people who want to engage with each other, not only communicate across languages. This is the case of community interpreting; people want to do things together, not only communicate their ideas. The latter is very much tied to the notion that the interpreter is neutral and does not take the side of the people or group using their services. Hence the neutrality paradigm of interpreting, which is still strong in some settings, especially institutional ones. However feminist interpreting and decolonial interpreting are here to challenge this paradigm. Lastly, because I mentioned the decolonial, thinking of the immediacy factor instead of the medium factor helps us not to rely on the dichotomy between writing and orality, which is also a colonial dichotomy. There is a strong hierarchy behind it. Colonisation categorised languages according to what was considered a language and what was not; writing was one of the elements that raised the status of languages and peoples.

**Gabriela Yañez**

Immediacy also has to do with unpredictability. The fact that interpreters do not know how the source discourse will unfold requires solid gender-based training, if they are to take informed decisions on the spot. Unpredictability makes an enormous difference between translation and interpreting.

**Olga García-Caro**

Yes, immediacy and bodily presence are big factors here. In community settings, the interpreter enters the communicative event with all their baggage: biases, understandings, training (or lack of), own experiences and so on. All this will have an impact on their choice of words, tone of voice, body language and other discourse elements. Education and training are key to developing awareness of how our presence and interpreting work can affect the outcome of the interaction, when immediacy and unpredictability are in play.

**Begoña Martínez**

A key point that distinguishes what you are expecting of a study on translation from one on interpreting is that you can claim more objectivity about a text that is already separated from the situations where the text and its translation originated. Meanwhile, in interpreting, it must be situated knowledge, because the actual people are there, and you, as the interpreter, are there too. You cannot abstract yourself from that situation as easily as you would do when you are dealing with words on a page. So the ethical issues of that physical one square metre apply. The things that have to be done have to done in the here and now.
**Carmen Acosta Vicente**

With orality also comes a lot of visibility and, in that sense, the interpreter is very exposed. Furthermore, when we think about an interpreter and a translator taking a position of advocacy, we are looking at different processes. What a translator does is probably going to be checked by another person, who may edit and make changes to the translation. When an interpreter takes a position of advocacy, it is done, it is out there, and there may be repercussions. In that sense, advocacy may be a riskier position to take in interpreting.

**Flor Montero**

You will pay a price: you will not be hired again for that type of event, by that agency, for that customer, etc. because you will get a reputation for being problematic, for having a voice.

**Gabriela Yañez**

Changing the medium also changes the landscape of actors involved. When you are translating, you are dealing with editors, publishing houses, the author and, ultimately, audiences who are going to be reading the text, whereas in interpreting the actors who have a voice and decide on how an event is going to develop are different. This also has a bearing on the stance that an interpreter may take. While there are publishing houses willing or open to embark on feminist translation projects, there are not many clients willing to commit to a feminist interpreting project.

**Flor Montero**

Well, it is happening more often now, especially with NGOs and groups who work with LGBTQ + communities. For instance, CEDAW (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, United Nations) asks the speakers and interpreters to speak in the grammatical feminine, which is not easy if you have not practised it beforehand. It is starting slowly, but a change is coming.

**Luciana Carvalho Fonseca**

Another keyword we have not mentioned that would add to the discussion is pressure. We mentioned the lack of predictability, immediacy, visibility, but not pressure.

**Carmen Acosta Vicente**

I agree pressure is an important factor, and it is influenced by the circumstances and the actors involved, but also simply by the immediacy of the interpreting situation. I would like to emphasise this, because the decision-making process happens so quickly. It is extremely difficult to make decisions in terms of advocacy when you are just trying to keep up with the encounter or the speech. Of course, it can come from an impulse at a given moment, but considering the constraints present in interpreting, it is hard to make an active choice in terms of advocacy unless it is common practice for you as a professional.
Flor Montero

We should also consider that, biologically speaking, simultaneous interpreting is very deregulating for the nervous system. You do not have 100% of your cognitive skills there because you are more in a fight-or-flight type of response when you are doing simultaneous interpreting. It is therefore easy to make a wrong decision.

Şebnem Susam-Saraeva

Following on from the question of decision making: From the perspective of feminism, what are the tensions between codes of ethics and professional guidelines and what the interpreters’ work is like on a day-to-day basis?

Carmen Acosta Vicente

I believe the tension between professional guidelines and the reality of interpreting, at least in public service interpreting, arises fundamentally from the idea that you can take a person, the interpreter, who has a number of social identities, perceptions, and understandings of the world, and bring them into a situation – usually quite sensitive – with other people who also have their own social identities, backgrounds, and understandings of the world, and then expect that none of these factors will influence the interpreter or the interpreting in any way. It is common for professional guidelines and codes of ethics to paint an image of the interpreter as a language processing box that stays in the background. In this view, neither the interpreter nor the other participants in the encounter are to have any type of bias. From a feminist perspective, and from the perspective of, I would say, common sense, this is just not possible. Interpreters face situations that are highly complex. They have to make difficult and significant ethical choices. By putting such an emphasis on neutrality, impartiality and invisibility, some of the existing interpreting codes of ethics fail to help interpreters navigate the challenges of their profession. I think this is at the core of the tension. I have conducted a survey for public service interpreters in Finland, the UK and Spain, precisely looking at the role of gender in this form of interpreting. The participants do not identify the issue as a tension per se; however, it is very much there. In their answers, interpreters mention the importance of following professional standards, neutrality and impartiality; at the same time, they talk about how they need to have empathy and connect with the client, and how their shared gendered experiences contribute to developing trust with the client. In my opinion, there is a marked tension there.

Olga García-Caro

Debates surrounding ethics have evolved from the early notion of the invisible and passive interpreter to discussions about the active interpreter with degrees of visibility and the impact of this visibility. More recently, interpreting quality has been associated with issues of role and visibility, and, in the Australian context, the focus is more on the lack of training (González 2019). For instance, in my feminist research, I found distorted ideas of impartiality and that ethical decisions are based on those ideas. Role is another
concept that is not fully understood (see Hale’s [2008] discussion of role); many interpreters indicate they know they are not empty boxes but do not know what exactly their role is (García-Caro forthcoming). Also, due to insufficient training, there is this idea of the code of ethics as being dogmatic, a document in which the right answers can always be found. We now train students to accept the fact that they are visible and active participants, and we give them the tools to deal with ethical dilemmas and challenges (see, e.g. Demand Control Schema in Dean and Pollard 2011). There is another important issue that was identified in Australia over thirty years ago in a government-funded report (McRobbie and Jupp 1992) which criticised the then-recommended code of ethics for not addressing women’s needs, despite women being the major users of language services in Australia. The report also suggested that language services should reflect the particular needs of women. Neither of these points have been addressed yet other than providing a female interpreter where possible.

Flor Montero

I hope that, if anything comes out of the debate we are carrying out here, it is that we question this idea of neutrality because, frankly, we as interpreters are asked to do the impossible (see also Cronin 2021). It is just not possible to be neutral. Neutrality does not exist, and it can leave you vulnerable to trauma, which, in some cases, results in substance abuse among interpreters – an issue that is rarely addressed. For instance, I have been working a lot with child pornography cases, interpreting for the investigators; at least there they recognise that the things interpreters see and say have an impact on their mental health, so we are checked up afterwards. That is a good thing. But the content of the cases are not the only thing that can cause trauma. The mere fact that you are asked to repress your emotions, that leaves you quite open to experiencing mental health problems. I wish we could normalise that it is OK to have emotions while you are interpreting and it is OK to speak about the things that are stirred within you.

Gabriela Yañez

If you feel any tension in your day-to-day job, it is because you are aware that there is a gender issue. Often there is no sensitivity that something is going on with gender, with equity or people’s rights. People abide by the codes, they do what they are supposed to do – or think they are supposed to do – and they do not feel any tension. They do not stop and think that they have to make a different decision, because they are not aware of the issues. For instance, I have seen that interpreters working at a global gender summit – all about equity, gender and inclusion – may still have no idea why the speakers specify the pronouns they would like to be called by. Raising awareness takes a lot of training and a lot of deconstruction of deeply rooted mainstream ideas.

Luciana Carvalho Fonseca

In terms of codes of ethics, it is worth noting that there are various kinds in both translation and interpreting. Initially, many of them were based strictly on the paradigm of equivalence, according to which there was a preference for literalness in certain types
of interpreting, especially legal interpreting, and a concern with faithfulness and loyalty. Then, you have the development of accountability-based ethics, which has to do with the functional linguistics tradition. In other words, the interpreted text has to function, and the interpreter is the person accountable for making it work. Third, you have the ethics of difference, which goes back to Antoine Berman’s theory of the other as another (1984). This means having the other being received as another and not only as a party devoid of any ideological background. There is also the ethics of social responsibility, which differs from one community of practice to another. The ethics of social responsibility helps translators and interpreters understand how they can be involved in working towards social justice. It really depends on the ethical framework in which we operate. We interpreters know that professional standards and codes of ethics change over time and that they vary according to the people we work with and the settings and socio-historical contexts we function in.

Şebnem Susam-Saraeva

We did touch upon the issue professionalism; how do issues of trust towards the interpreters and the professionalism expected of them come into the picture when we talk about feminist interpreting?

Begoña Martínez

Not to be very binary about it, but I distinguish between two main groups of interpreting users: the people who actually expect you to be feminist and the people who do not. When people are in the know about gender issues, they really appreciate that you make an effort, like the first signs of inclusive, non-discriminatory or bias-free language, e.g. “Good morning, ladies, gentlemen and non-binary folk” in the opening sentence. Such efforts are very much appreciated and then it flows easily from there, because they already expect you to know what you are saying. Or you can ask them to type their pronouns up next to their Zoom usernames. If it is the kind of audience that is into these issues, everyone quickly adds their pronouns, because they do want to normalise the practice and they do want you to use them. But then there is another crowd in which there will only be the odd person out who adds their pronoun and the moment you say something that is in the know, you will get recognition from them, while for all the other people, it will just fly over their heads. So in some audiences, it does not feel like it is worth the effort, but you make the effort anyway for the one person who will really appreciate it.

Gabriela Yañez

In Argentina where the market is dominated by conference interpreting, there is a mainstream community of interpreters who will mostly abide by AIIC standards. There is particularly one feminist group of translators and interpreters that remains outside of this mainstream community. In the mainstream community of interpreters, you are not expected to be an activist. I think the private market would not tolerate this type of participation or activism from the interpreters either.
Luciana Carvalho Fonseca

From my experience in the São Paulo market, we have APIC (Professional Association of Conference Interpreters) and AIIC standards, in addition to many professionals accredited by the ATA (American Translators Association). The professional standards in all of these associations mention objectivity, neutrality, faithfulness, and so on. But if we think of interpreting outside the institutions, things are slightly different. These two important concepts of trust and professionalism are very much related to the expectations of the parties involved. As long as expectations are aligned for the outcome to be a successful event or meeting, trust and professionalism are factors that can be discussed and negotiated. Negotiation can be achieved by the parties asking questions, such as: Does the interpreter expect to be briefed by the client before an event? Does the client want everything interpreted, even at difficult moments? I am thinking of birth settings in particular. Does the labouring woman want to have everything interpreted for her? The immediate answer would be yes, but there are studies (e.g. Pizzini 1991) showing how humour is used in labour and birth by the healthcare staff, who usually make jokes even at the very last stages of labour. If you are the interpreter, are you going to burden the labouring woman with a translated joke? I probably would not. Because that is not what she is interested in or needs at that moment. But this would have to be discussed with her in advance. It is all about knowing your setting, knowing the people you are working with. Or supporting, if you are not actually working, because many people do not get paid for feminist interpreting. We must think about all these layers of complexity. The question of paid/unpaid work is a major discussion in feminist translation as well. To date, many people in the Global North still say that feminist translation is unpaid work. I tend to agree, but wouldn’t we want to change this? Can feminist interpreters/translators in the Global South afford to do unpaid work as much as feminist interpreters/translators in the Global North can? Lastly, the term trust is particularly important in social movements. Social movements are all about trust. When you interpret in social movements, you are usually part of that movement. As a feminist interpreter, I consider myself part of some social movements which I interpret for, and in those cases expectations tend to be aligned and things tend to work well.

Carmen Acosta Vicente

Trust is indeed a fundamental factor in interpreting. When we think about how trust and professionalism are portrayed in interpreting, then the idea of neutrality comes up a lot. The notion is that, to be professional and trustworthy, the interpreter needs to be neutral. However, if we considered the parties involved in the interpreter-mediated encounters (even in institutional settings), we would realise that even if they talk about neutrality, there is room for agency, there is room for the interpreter to be more active and to advocate to a certain extent. There is a paper by de Cotret, Brisset and Leanza (2021), “A Typology of Healthcare Interpreter Positionings”, and the subtitle is precisely “When ‘Neutral’ Means Proactive”. The authors conducted a series of interviews with service providers in the context of healthcare interpreting. They asked service providers about their perception of what a good interpreter is, what they expect when working with an interpreter, etc. The respondents mention the importance of neutrality, but they also
expect the interpreter to intervene, explain, clarify and have empathy for the parties. There is another paper by Rosalind Edwards, Bogusia Temple and Claire Alexander (2005) about the role of trust in interpreting. In this case, they conducted interviews with clients. Apart from linguistic skills and fluency, the clients highlighted that they considered the interpreter to be good and trustworthy when they were proactive and got involved in the situation. Therefore, it seems that, at least in certain contexts, the parties involved are not expecting the interpreter to be a mere conduit; they are expecting the interpreter to get involved to a certain extent. We need to base ideas of professionalism and trust on what the parties actually want. Again, I do not think the traditional perception of the interpreter’s role that is present in many codes of ethics is helpful in this regard, and it definitely leaves little room for advocacy or for feminist interpreting to occur.

Olga García-Caro

I tend to agree with the notion of client/patient-centred work, which involves professionals and interpreters working together in the best interest of the client/patient. This means not only solid training for interpreters but also for professionals in understanding our work and needs. Pre-session briefings are crucial but not always available for a range of reasons. Traditionally, they have not been considered important because of the view of the interpreter being a “translation machine” and of neutrality, which results in a lack of trust in interpreters’ capacity to provide specialist and professional input. Even interpreters themselves have this view of their role: “I am just an interpreter, I am here to interpret only”. Moira Inghilleri, in discussing ethics that seek justice (2012, 52), calls for codes of ethics that give a more visible and active role to interpreters, so that they are as accountable as the other participants/speakers for the words they say (2012, 127). She also points out that the current codes allow the interpreters not to carry any blame or responsibility, supporting the idea of invisibility (2012, 49). In my experience of conducting focus groups with service providers who work with interpreters in cases of domestic violence, there is a general lack of understanding of our work. Some did not know we had a code of ethics, did not know about the importance of pre/post briefings, our role or our needs in order to provide quality interpreting. However, many of them did state that one of the things they appreciate most is when the interpreter takes the initiative, for example, to explain cultural aspects that are very important to make a sound safety plan for the victim and their children. Viewing the interpreter as part of the professional team is crucial to assist clients accessing justice and other services.

Şebnem Susam-Saraeva

In our current research on translating informed consent in maternal healthcare, midwives have been telling us something similar. They want the interpreters to be involved, to be invested in the relationship with their client. They want them to take the time to explain things, even to go and sort out any gaps in information or any misunderstandings directly with the birthing women/people, while the midwives continue their work, as long as they receive a summary of the exchange afterwards. If the service providers
have such different expectations, why this insistence on neutrality or impartiality? When
you dig deeper, maybe it is not so much the institutions expecting these qualities, but the
interpreters themselves. Maybe it is to protect the interpreters from being liable: “I’m just
an interpreter, don’t shoot the messenger”.

**Flor Montero**

No, but institutions do require it. It depends on the type of client you are working with,
because there are some who are definitely married to the idea that trust is a synonym of obe-
dience. They will be content as long as you “obey them”, which is a very colonial concept,
especially considering the South and our perspective, and that we are interpreting European
languages. This idea that white people can come and teach us because they are “saving us” is
still very dominant in the Global South. If you question that, you are a bad interpreter; you
are not professional enough. Colonialism is still very much alive and kicking.

**Begoña Martínez**

The code of ethics also demands secrecy and confidentiality as part of professionalism. As
feminist interpreters, we are expected to keep silent about many things we hear during
our interpreting work that we would not keep silent about in any other aspect of our
lives. For example, interpreting for people who have requested asylum – even after
they are dead, I cannot discuss them with anybody. This is not about revealing their
deepest secrets – how can I delete a person from my mind when I have been interpreting
her for months? It is silencing, it feels colonial, like you said, Flor.

**Flor Montero**

It is very easy to take the side of the oppressor, because for that, you are asked to do absol-
utely nothing. “See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil”. If you are to take the feminist side,
however, you would have to question things, and that would bring you consequences.
Every time we are not vocal about feminist values, we are siding with the oppressor.
What I do is that, yes, I do work for mainstream institutions, but then, I do a lot of
pro-bono interpreting for NGOs. This is part of my small effort to try and bring some
balance, because otherwise we are the tools of the oppressors every day.

**Şebnem Susam-Saraeva**

This brings us to our next question: From a feminist perspective, how do power differ-
entials between the service users, clients/patients and interpreters impact upon interpret-
ing? What may be the consequences of “objectivity”, “invisibility” and “impartiality” of
interpreters vis-à-vis these power differentials?

**Luciana Carvalho Fonseca**

Social sciences and feminist theory have taught us in translation studies that relations
involving communication or language are also relations of symbolic power, but
interpreting studies has not yet come around to acknowledging this. It is well-known in these fields that the meaning of what is said, the language used and who is speaking are connected to the value attached to the bodies and languages involved. We can think about this by referring to Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977) notion of “linguistic market”, for example, which is the notion that certain languages spoken by certain people can enhance or diminish the chance of material gain. In decolonial terms we would think about this through “colonial difference” (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 25) which roughly means certain people and certain speakers of certain languages are considered more human than others. The difference and values attached to languages and people have been illustrated in studies on health settings. For instance, Rosario del Socorro Avellaneda Yajahuanca (2015) studied how Bolivian women experienced birth in the Brazilian healthcare system; she found that these women were exposed to abuse by medical professionals at all stages of their perinatal care. There was hardly any material available in their language and they were demeaned in their culture. If there had been public interpreters available to them, would this have happened? Would the power relations between the women and the healthcare staff have been somewhat “softened”? Would these women have suffered less if there had been institutional interpreters? I guess, depending on the setting, power relations can be transformed with an interpreter’s presence. We know there is violence in the healthcare system even when there are no language issues; language issues can actually add to the structural violence and racism that are already there. Therefore, interpreters could also be used to influence this balance of power and address structural violence within the institutions. In addition, we cannot forget that these notions of objectivity, invisibility and impartiality mirror a particular form of knowing. Objectivity has been propagated by Western science in general; it shapes the scientific method, where you have theory, data and the “observer” separated from one another. It is also associated with empiricist, universalist, positivist epistemologies, and all of these influence the way people work. On the other hand, feminist theory, and I would even say feminist interpreting, is based on subjectivity, on being situated, on being part of a movement from practice to theory, and not the other way around. Because of this, feminist translation and interpreting must be sceptical about objectivity and continue to privilege a partial perspective, as well as subjectivity and positionality. Operating within a feminist framework would require interpreters to be aware of which epistemologies they are supporting. We are at a crucial crossroads because interpreting studies clearly lies within a drastically different epistemological framework compared to feminist interpreting studies. If we also think of decolonial feminist interpreting, another layer of difference would be added. We have to learn to deal with these constraints. So when Flor says she is trying to balance things out, she is actually balancing epistemological frameworks, she is balancing the powers, different ways of being and knowing.

Carmen Acosta Vicente

Of course, power differentials are very context-dependent. There are certain contexts where they become more evident, such as asylum or police interviews, cases of gender-based violence, etc. I believe that the issue of power asymmetry or power dynamics is not only relevant because one of the participants is in a position of institutional or social power and the other one is part of a marginalised or vulnerable
It also has to do with the individual’s perception of each party and the situation as a whole. I think this is at least partially cultural. If the client has a certain idea of an institution, for instance a hospital, how it works, what is appropriate when interacting with a service provider, and what the consequences of what they say are, all of these may influence their behaviour, decisions and footing in the interaction. Here I would like to highlight the role of the interpreter because they are in an exceptional position where they have direct access to the client, and most often, knowledge of the context the client is coming from. In this position, the interpreter can identify some of the barriers to communication and let the service provider know. If a service provider genuinely wants to help the client and make the encounter work, they need this knowledge. However, if the interpreter is an “invisible conduit”, this can never happen. The interpreter never has a chance to intervene. When it comes to managing power asymmetries, the “ethical” stances that the interpreter is supposed to take are not contributing to all participants being on an equal footing in the interaction.

**Gabriela Yañez**

When we are talking about power differentials, we are thinking about service users and the institutions providing services. But there are also power differentials involving the interpreters themselves. In this debate, we are placing interpreters outside of those differentials. This is another point to consider: what is the power differential, not just between service users and institutions, but also between interpreters and participants? The more power the interpreters have, the more they will be able to intervene, advocate or do whatever they deem necessary in a given situation. This is also connected to what an interpreter can do to avoid perpetuating power asymmetries, protect patients or uphold human rights.

**Flor Montero**

There is also something to be said about the power differentials between male and female interpreters. For instance, here in Mexico, it is very clear that those who get the best-paid gigs are men, especially if they are white, tall and blue-eyed, and the rest of us come in second (cf. Christen y Gracia 2017). If we want interpreting to change, then we have to help this group question how they are benefiting from their privilege – especially considering that at least 75% of all interpreters in Mexico are women. Even though we might be paid the same wages, we are not offered the same opportunities for interpreting just because of gender, for instance in areas concerning oil, mining, the military, homeland security, etc. We should talk about that and bring into the spotlight so that we can help the interpreting community raise some questions.

**Begoña Martínez**

When I think about being an interpreter in situations of clear power differentials, the most feminist thing to consider is that you are that person’s voice and that person’s ears. The fact that we are there as an interpreter means that person is already affected by an imbalance of power. If that person has been given a power boost with your presence as an interpreter, your responsibility is to ensure the best use of that power boost the
oppressed person has in that environment. Because the world is already unfair enough for us to be shy about the power we can supply in a situation of power imbalance. And if you do not want to give the power boost to that person you are interpreting, then you should have rejected the job, but that brings in another question: Are we “allowed” to, are we able to reject jobs in this economy, under these circumstances? There is power in being able to pick and choose your assignments, too.

**Șebnem Susam-Saraeva**

Yes, being able to turn down a job because, for instance, it is particularly misogynistic, LGBTphobic or racist … Which brings us to our next question: What would feminist interpreting look like in practice? How could feminist interpreters deal with any legal or professional consequences?

**Flor Montero**

I really do not care much about AIIC standards and if I get a chance to use inclusive language, to help somebody who is in pain, I will do it. And yes, I do bear the consequences, because sometimes the agencies find out that you sided with the “weak part”, but sometimes the agencies applaud it as well. You must pick your battles, when you can make a difference, when it is going to be worth the trouble you will get into. Because if not, if you do not start questioning, for instance, misogynistic speeches, LGBTphobia, racism, etc. right there through the microphone when they are happening, then all of this discussion we are having here is for nothing. We need to summon the courage, help one another and support one another. If we do this, it will become more of a normal practice. It will never be fully accepted, but at least people will know that it is happening somewhere. It could be an inspiration for others.

**Gabriela Yañez**

A word Luciana used is key here: in the end, it all comes down to negotiation. We have to see not just what we perceive as important in a situation or what decision we think is the best for the user or client. We should also try to see what they perceive as needed, because otherwise we run the risk of imposing our judgment on them. You may say “OK, I’m not going to interpret this, because this might be offensive for the user”, but maybe the user would like to listen to that and be able to respond. So by making those decisions, we run the risk of robbing the user of a chance to respond and take an active role in that discussion. It is important to negotiate what the user would like us to do or how they would like us to help in communicating in a situation like this.

**Flor Montero**

I do not think you might be robbing people of the opportunity to respond. On the contrary, you might be putting the spotlight on what is problematic, right there and then, because they are going to ask, “What is it that was said?”, instead of having just another thing that goes unnoticed, unchallenged. Of course, it depends on the context.
I was thinking about the conference environment. It is vastly different if you are one-to-one, where you can ask people how they want to respond.

**Gabriela Yañez**

Absolutely, Flor. It works in an environment in which there is a dialogue, more in community interpreting settings. But I was also putting myself in that person’s shoes; I would not like someone else to make a decision for me. I would like to be informed of what is going on and then be able to act myself and have a voice. Otherwise, it would be paternalistic for the interpreter to filter the message, because they consider it offensive. It would be further reinforcing the power differentials, I believe.

**Flor Montero**

I am not saying that you should not interpret the whole speech. For instance, once when we were interpreting, the speaker used the word *maricón*. My colleague interpreted it as “faggot” and then she immediately apologised for using that word. That is the kind of intervention I am referring to. Later, she came and asked me if she had done the right thing by apologising. I said, “I think it was fair because if somebody was offended in the audience, at least they knew you had their back”. That is the kind of intervention I am talking about.

**Gabriela Yañez**

I think this is similar to what Nicole Doerr (2018) talks about in her work *Political Translation. How Social Movement Democracies Survive*. She distinguishes two kinds of interventions: at the macro and micro levels. Doerr says that at the macro level we can, for example, help carefully choose the right setting for a situation to take place (2018, 76). We can advise on how to set up a meeting to foster everyone’s participation in an equitable manner. In this way, we can help educate clients and service users. This is a good way of adopting a positive perspective, rather than just a negative one. We are assuming people are oppressors because they want to be oppressors, but there may be people who just do not know any better. At the micro level, Doerr mentions persuasion and disruption (2018, 4). With persuasion, she again refers to education, “by directing the attention to power imbalances and drawing on the egalitarian commitments of those who otherwise would be unlikely to recognize their own structured privilege” (2018, 4). This is an interesting way of looking at the matter; to be able to distinguish interventions at different levels, to offer interventions that may be educational, to be there to help people see the best way of communicating with a person so they do not feel offended or diminished. Then, there is disruption, which is more radical. You interrupt and say: “I am not going to continue if this offensive language is being used”.

**Begoña Martínez**

Yes, when you enter the room and if you are there first, you can decide how people are going to sit. In a bilateral environment, you can choose how people are going to sit just by
the place you sit yourself. You can create a less confrontational environment, more like a roundtable, for instance.

**Gabriela Yañez**

It tends to happen that the people who hire you have no idea of what interpreting is all about or how it should take place. It is often up to us to educate, to say what you believe is best for the communication to flow equally and smoothly. In response to this question, I was thinking of concrete practices and the first thing that came to my mind was what Flor was saying regarding inclusive language, and in Spanish there is a lot going on with that. But then, in reading Doerr, I was very enlightened by the idea that we have other types of interventions that may be more negotiated. Maybe people will get more receptive this way than if you just try to impose certain language choices, irrespective of the fact that with some people you may still negotiate such choices in language.

**Flor Montero**

I guess it all depends on the context and the extent. Saying an inclusive greeting is not really going to affect anybody, but using inclusive language throughout is going to get reactions. You need to decide how far you will go. Obviously pointing out that something is being offensive ought to be the very last resort, by that stage the situation must have escalated a lot. But I would be very careful in saying, “Do not do this because you are depriving people of their own choices”, because then you are shutting yourself up, you are depriving yourself of a voice, because you are also part of this communication scheme, and you are also affected by the things that are being said. It is not only about the audience, but yourself, especially if it is something sexist. Of course we are also being affected, and if you censor yourself, as we always have, we are once again putting our needs last. There has to be a balance. As interpreters, we must reclaim our right to be treated as humans, otherwise, we will be falling back into the myth of neutrality, and we have already established that does not exist. We deserve to have a voice and we deserve to have an opinion.

**Gabriela Yañez**

This is what I was referring to before when I said, let’s consider the power differentials between not just speakers and listeners, but also interpreters. I have noticed that different communities of interpreters perceive themselves in different ways. At the global gender summit I was referring to, I was really struck by the power of the sign language interpreters compared to spoken language interpreters. At some point the sign language interpreter stopped the speaker and said: “Excuse me, you will have to speak slowly because otherwise I will not be able to do my job”. She just opened her mic and threw that out to him. The whole team of sign language interpreters were presenting themselves with a lot of power compared to us, spoken language interpreters.

**Begoña Martínez**

We are looking at this issue from a very confrontational point of view, but there are lots of feminist clients now and personally I have learned a lot from them. So it is not
all about dealing with consequences. In fact, there can be cooperation with the client. Also, sometimes the client and the person who is receiving the interpreting are the same. Very horizontal NGOs, for example, abide by different rules: they insist that the interpreters introduce themselves, that they take part in the exercises for controlling stress and talking about feelings, and that they are part of the “temperature of the room” exercises. When you have a meeting carried out with that much feminist thought in it, your job becomes so much easier, not only because you know what the people expect of you, but also because they are actually cooperating to better communicate between themselves. So maybe feminist interpreting is not just something that disrupts what is happening in the world. Maybe interpreting is lagging way behind the feminist situations that are out there and people who are working in different ways. Because we normally work for the system, or capitalist and patriarchal environments, and not normally for the people who are actually doing things differently, we are not learning at the same pace.

**Luciana Carvalho Fonseca**

I guess what everyone is saying is that feminist interpreting can look quite different depending on the setting and the constellation of people. Beyond any consequences of the practice, there are many opportunities feminist interpreting may bring that are still unexplored. I guess this is why we are having this discussion. Feminist interpreting and feminist interpreting studies can offer a lot of opportunity for questioning established and hegemonic power, knowledge and being. And because feminist interpreting should be regarded as an epistemological struggle which is different from the epistemological framework that interpreting studies is based on, it is also an avenue for producing new knowledges on interpreting. If we better understand feminist interpreting, we may arrive at new ways of doing interpreting and being an interpreter. It is also important to stress that feminist interpreting is not really a reaction to interpreting studies; it is another way of doing and thinking about interpreting. It is perhaps a break or creative response, an alternative option in the sense of a decolonial option (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 124–127), because interpreting studies still has to deal with what the market wants. Feminist interpreting poses certain questions that remain unanswered: Why has interpreting studies not embraced gender? Which flows of knowledge have been silenced and kept out of sight in the discipline; which ones have been promoted and whom do they benefit? In what way has the discipline contributed to social justice and how; in what way has it helped maintain the “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks 2004)? Which new coalitional spaces have been opened up by feminist interpreting? Because, as we know, speaking and being heard are necessary conditions for human freedom. Who is the feminist interpreter who enables these coalitional spaces; how and in which conditions do they work; how are they trained? What kind of public spaces are constituted by the coming together of people around feminist interpreting? In other words, how does feminist interpreting operate “the political” – as in Hannah Arendt’s understanding of the political as a coming together of people who form and shape public space without the mediation of institutions. There are so many other questions to be answered and explored by focusing on decolonial and feminist interpreting.
Carmen Acosta Vicente

When I was thinking about this question, I was thinking of the article you co-authored, Olga, (Norma and García-Caro 2016), where you talk about interpreter training for cases of gender-based violence in Australia. You mention the fact that, from a feminist perspective, the interpreter has a political and social role there. When I think about the survey data I am currently analysing, some interpreters mention this, and they do so from an intersectional point of view. I remember a participant, a sign language interpreter, who stated that, in situations where the only women in the encounter are herself and the deaf female client, she (the interpreter) makes a point to make space for herself during the encounter to empower the deaf female client to also make space for herself. Here the interpreter is taking a position of advocacy that goes way beyond impartiality, invisibility, neutrality, etc. Of course, this can sometimes come with potential consequences. If interpreting studies opens up to a feminist perspective, and training programmes include gender-related education, such situations should be openly discussed, and interpreters should be made aware of the consequences. Even if we do not expect all interpreters to become advocates, there are still realistic expectations we can have, that interpreters are aware of gender issues from an intersectional point of view, and that they are aware of their own biases as well as those of others. This last point is very much present in the work of Marey-Castro and Del Pozo Triviño (2020). This is a feminised profession, so other people’s biases in terms of gender are relevant. It is important to reflect on how those gender biases impact upon their perception of interpreters and of interpreting as a profession. Furthermore, when we talk about feminist interpreting, it does not always need to materialise in a blatant form of advocacy. There are subtle ways too. For instance, there is another paper by Lynne Eighinger and Ben Karlin (2001) where they talk about applying the feminist-relational approach to communication in interpreting. In other words, they propose applying feminist values, such as consensus building, cooperation or active, non-judgemental listening, to interpreter-mediated communication. From this point of view, the interpreter-mediated encounter and communication are oriented toward cooperation, and the interpreter has an active role in that. Far from being a conduit, the interpreter is coordinating so that cooperative communication can happen. This is not unrealistic. In fact, in many ways, this is what we already think interpreters do. Moreover, if we think about certain settings where interpreters work, there are efforts in the same direction as well. For instance, patient-centred communication in healthcare is oriented toward the same goal of managing power asymmetries between healthcare providers and patients, and empowering patients to get involved in the management of their health. I think these communication models are very compatible. All in all, it is not always about huge actions; change can come in subtle but effective ways too.

Olga García-Caro

Exactly! I agree with the idea of practical ways of doing feminist interpreting in our everyday work. One small example from my research: service providers stated that appointing only one interpreter for both the victim and the perpetrator of domestic violence was a way of supporting perpetrators through the judicial system. Interpreters also
stated that this was wrong and that it made their work very difficult. Again, interpreters' job insecurity does not allow them to refuse the job. This is a system issue and interpreters have little power to change it. However, there are things the interpreters can do: such as explaining their role to both parties and stressing confidentiality; not sitting next to the parties while waiting to go into the court room (yes, this happens!); making sure the victim, and not only the defendant, receives an interpretation of the court orders; disclosing any ethical dilemmas or issues as soon as they become aware of them; and, actively working with lawyers and court staff to address their needs in order to provide a quality interpreting service. Of course, if we are not sufficiently trained, we will not know that this is a problem. If we do not have specialist training about gender-based violence and its dynamics, we might continue to enable this inequality. There are other things we can do in terms of our research based on feminist values: giving voice to those silenced and focusing on social issues and inequalities with the aim to improve the lives of those accessing justice and public services. We can also develop training and teach with the same aims in mind and move away from the sole focus on meaning transfer and technical skills, encouraging critical analysis and reflective practice to create awareness of the interpreter's political and social role. As Jesús De Manuel Jerez (2010, 134–145) proposes, we need new paradigms in the interpreting field that are based on social justice for professional practice, education and research – in other words, a feminist interpreting that serves society, seeks equality and applies feminist values.

Șebnem Susam-Saraeva

Thank you all for these excellent observations and suggestions. Our final question is about origins. The inception of feminist translation studies is often credited to Canada, Quebec in particular, and there were very specific socio-political and historical reasons for that. It looks like the origins of feminist interpreting studies may be in countries where Spanish or Portuguese are spoken. What may be the socio-political and historical reasons for this?

Luciana Carvalho Fonseca

The fact that interpreting studies has not pursued critical investigations – including post-structuralist, post-modern and feminist critiques – on their modern and colonial foundations is a major reason. We cannot forget that interpreting studies has been carried out by a very privileged group, predominantly white, largely male and European, who do very well in the aforementioned “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks 2004), and who have produced theory largely from their own worldly and situated experience while claiming objectivity. This is illustrated by translation turns and interpreting paradigms (e.g. paradigms of interpretive theory, cognitive processing, neuro approach, etc.). Interpreter education has also prioritised conference interpreting at hegemonic European institutions. This is understandable if one considers that interpreting studies has been predominantly European and that decolonial thinking emerged outside European-centred epistemological frameworks. On the other hand, in Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries, a constellation of factors has enabled interpreting studies to be addressed from a feminist and decolonial perspective. I will draw on my
own experience and standpoint to illustrate what I mean. I am a middle-class woman and academic, who in Brazil is considered white. When my time came to give birth, had I gone with the flow, I would have likely ended up in a C-section; because the C-section rate in my demographics is approximately 90%, and over 95% in private hospitals. Not to mention obstetric violence rates in Brazil: 1 out of 4 women are victims of obstetric violence, and the rate is even higher for migrant women. It is worth stressing that the role of gender – and race – in capitalist-exploitation and patriarchal-domination in the Global South is higher in intensity than in the Global North. In Brazil, middle-class women’s bodies in birth settings have become another frontier for capital accumulation. There are private hospitals, physicians, health professionals in ICUs, incubator and ultrasound manufacturers, private health insurance companies, surgical centres, beauty industry, catering, etc. thriving on our C-section rates, which have increased by 400 per cent in 40 years. With this amount of violence and capitalist exploitation, as an interpreter I – with all the other feminist interpreters living in similar contexts of violence – am able to make connections that are not so much part of the reality of, let’s say, conference interpreters in the Global North. Therefore, instead of interpreting studies, partial answers to the problems we experience are provided by feminist studies and now by feminist interpreting practices. The social, political and historical reasons for feminist and decolonial interpreting studies and practices having originated in the Global South are rather unfortunate – that is, the enormous rates of violence against women in the region. On a more positive note, this means there are feminist interpreters in the region committed to changing the status quo.

Gabriela Yañez

In Argentina, as well as in the region, the current socio-political and historical changes have offered fertile ground to reflect on established interpreting practices in emerging contexts and to provide new agendas. Some of the events that have paved the way for change include the Ni una menos movement. “Ni una menos” (“not one [woman] less”) is a slogan that gave its name to a feminist movement that emerged in Argentina in 2015, which would later expand to several countries in Latin America and other regions of the world. It is a protest collective that opposes violence against women, and its most serious and visible consequence: femicide. There is also a strong movement to demand the decriminalisation of abortion. Argentina’s Act on the Voluntary Interruption of Pregnancy (IVE) was approved by the National Congress on 30 December 2020 and enacted on 14 January 2021. In July 2010, Argentina became the first country in Latin America to recognise the right to same-sex marriage. Multiple gender identities have also been recognised and made visible. The School of Journalism and Social Communication at Universidad Nacional de La Plata awarded the first non-binary diploma: “Profesore en Comunicación Social”. In fact, Argentina is the first country in the region to recognise identities beyond the binary categories of gender in the registration and identification systems. It recognises non-dichotomous identities by incorporating the nomenclature “X” in the National Identity Card as an option for all persons who do not identify themselves as male or female. Under the current administration, Argentina has a Ministry of Women, Genders and Diversity, and many governmental agencies as well as educational institutions use gender-inclusive language for their official communications and
websites. In 2020, a labour quota was established for transgender people who meet the conditions of suitability. All of these socio-cultural and political events have become hallmarks and indicate a turning point that cannot be ignored by interpreting studies and that may drive a feminist and gender-aware agenda in interpreting research.

Carmen Acosta Vicente

As Gabriela has illustrated through her examples from Argentina, the feminist movement has had a strong revival in Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries. Feminist activism is thriving in many Spanish-speaking countries, enabling resistance and bringing important socio-political changes (e.g. the reform of the legislation on sexual and reproductive health and voluntary interruption of pregnancy introduced by the Spanish Government in 2022). In Spain the fourth feminist wave has had a great impact. Feminism is often discussed in the social and political spheres, both positively and negatively. Whatever the ideological position, feminism as a topic is omnipresent. Discussing different issues from a gender perspective has become more and more common, and there are strong efforts to apply a gender perspective to all sorts of disciplines. This social climate is inspiring and influencing the development of feminist work in interpreting studies.

Şebnem Susam-Saraeva

Thank you once again for your participation and your thoughtful contributions. I am very much looking forward to sharing this debate with colleagues in interpreting practice and research.

Notes

2. A more recent volume, Gould and Tahmasebian 2020, similarly has chapters on interpreting, but the only contributions on feminism and gender are related to translation.

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