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"I understand the culture. So, I understand who is lying" – Language and cultural mediators as brokers and para-ethnologists

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1.Introduction

The increasing linguistic and ethnic diversity in Germany due to growing numbers of refugees and asylum seekers presents state authorities in particular with challenges (Aigner 2017: 82-83; Kosnick 2014; Statistisches Bundesamt 2018).[2] How do they deal with situations of multilingualism and "multilingual linguistic spaces" (Marx & Nekula 2013: 63)? A look at the interactions of state officers and their increasingly diverse clientele illustrates the crucial

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[2] In 2018, around 20.8 million out of 81.6 million people in Germany had a migration background, which applies to one in four people. A person has a migration background if she/he or one parent did not have German citizenship at birth. These numbers corresponded to an increase of 2.5% over the previous year. Of the 20.8 million people with a migration background, around 13.5 million were not born in Germany, but immigrated in the course of their lives for family reasons (48%), employment (19%), flight and asylum (15%) or study (5%) (Statistisches Bundesamt 2018).

underlying difference in language. To interpret different languages, and moreover to translate different normative ideas in everyday interactions, numerous institutions and state authorities rely on the support of a group that describes itself as language and cultural mediators, most of whom have bicultural backgrounds. Their translating services appear crucial for mutual understanding between the state officials and their clients; and therefore, for the whole functioning of bureaucratic processes. Language and cultural mediators mediate between their clients and state authorities, by interpreting and translating different languages, perspectives and cultural backgrounds, but their linguistic skills sometimes convey mistrust (Cabot 2019). From their point of view, they differ from professional interpreters, who spend years studying for their profession, yet focusing mostly on language rather than on "culture". For language and cultural mediators, translation goes beyond language and clearly includes "culture" and "cultural difference" in encounters between state officials and their clients, which is why they perceive themselves as enriching for both sites.

This paper is based on my recent explorative fieldwork on language and cultural mediators in two German federal states as part of the DFG-funded interdisciplinary project "Police-Translations – Multilingualism and the construction of cultural difference in everyday police work".[3] In the course of my research, I visited three social associations that offer language and cultural mediation, interviewed different language mediators as well as authorities, who had already used these or other language mediation institutions; including three group interviews. All interviews have been transcribed and analysed to focus on the language and cultural mediators' view. The classical anthropological method of participant observation turned out to be quite difficult, due to data protection reasons and lacking research permits. Yet, I took part in a three-day training course for interpreters and tried to shadow and accompany language mediators in their job, as often I could.

After this introduction, I explain terms, definitions and the state of research. Section 2 explores how language and cultural mediators come to their jobs. I show their working conditions and include their thoughts on morality, ethics and professionalisation. Section 3 offers a case study illustrating language and cultural mediators acting as brokers, bridging information gaps and mediating between different state officials and their clients. Yet, they also work for their own profit (Boissevain 1974: 148, 158). Section 4 discusses these aspects of brokerage. As Martín and Phelan (2009: 12) argue, "cultural mediators are often described as cultural brokers who can bridge two different views". They mediate between different sides (Pöchhacker 2007: 5) and act as intermediaries, mediators and middlemen and -women (Lindquist 2015: 870). Section 5 focuses on emic translation theories and brings in findings from my fieldwork, language and cultural mediators' thoughts about normativity

[3] In our project, we look at different perspectives on police interactions with their clients. Based on participant observation, interviews, group research and role-playing scenarios in police trainings, we are interested in the different dynamics of multilingualism and the construction of cultural difference in everyday police work. The project includes Jan Beek (head of the project), Thomas Bierschenk, Bernd Meyer, Marcel Müller and Theresa Radermacher. My own research is embedded in this project in the widest sense of policing. Some of the mediators I have spoken to also interpret for the police. As I have yet to gain permission to accompany them to the police, I use examples of people who deal with interpreting in social contexts in this paper.

in discussion. Section 6 explores their notions of "culture" from their position. While anthropologists today try to avoid "culture" as explanation for social phenomena and even almost reject it (Beek & Bierschenk 2020), they often put it like me in quotation marks to make sure to avoid stereotyping and framing "culture" as something stable and not changeable. My results show that language and cultural mediators however use this concept widely. Due to their claim to be able to interpret and to translate social phenomena as "cultural", I also identify language and cultural mediators as "para-ethnologists" (Beek & Bierschenk 2020). They explicitly refer to their knowledge of "culture" and use it as a category of explanation, which is similar to the use of the term in classical ethnography. My paper thus brings into play the discussion on "culture", which is something unexpected and new. As para-ethnologists, they also defend their field of activity and competence externally, not least towards academic social anthropologists. For example, after gaining access to organisations of cultural mediation in Germany, it was possible to interview people, but quite difficult to take part in their everyday work and specific training courses. I only was able to use randomly and spontaneously the ethnographic methods of participant observation and "shadowing" the work of people.

2. Terms, definitions and state of research

In Germany, there is a wide range of interpreting practices which rely on different ideas. The degree of professionalism differs and is wide ranging. Ad hoc interpreting situations can arise, when relatives and acquaintances, housewives and students interpret spontaneously for their families or neighbours (Stanek 2011: 22), but also planned assignments, e.g. from state authorities. The professional title of interpreter is neither protected nor registered in Germany and basically anyone can call him/herself an interpreter (Stanek 2011: 32). In the literature, the term "translation" is used for written translation services, "interpreting" means oral translation (Pöchhacker 2007). Interestingly, this differentiation is not always found in everyday speech. Even actors who often use interpreters kindly ask them to "translate" their conversations.

In addition to the use of the services of studied and sworn interpreters who are remunerated, authorities and institutions are increasingly relying on people with knowledge of heritage languages, trained by various associations (see also Rudvin & Tomassini 2008).[4] Due to the increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers in recent years in Germany, the demand for interpreters is growing steadily. More and more interpreting institutions and organisations train people with a migration background who understand German to meet the demand for interpreting services (for Italia, see Tuckett 2018: 252). These so-called language and cultural mediators accompany migrants who understand little or no German to necessary official dates at authorities, with the goal of mutual understanding. Their training varies from one-day training courses to intensive yearlong programmes (see also Martín & Phelan 2009: 13). My paper refers explicitly

[4] Of course, this does not mean, that professional interpreters can't be bilingual or bicultural. I am aware of the complexity and the danger of using the term "heritage languages". Authorities mean the language of their respective clients, when they are looking for people who are able to speak their "heritage languages" as well as German.

to this group of people who call themselves language and cultural mediators. In other parts of Germany, they are also called integration mediators (Bahadır 2010). Most of them attend training courses by several associations and are paid for their services, which I will deal with in section 2.

Sami Sauerwein (2006: 5) describes this practice as community interpreting, meaning face-to-face-interpreting in institutionalised settings, mostly by ordinary persons, and very often with highly sensitive communication contents, whereby interpreters play an active role in the communication. They help to clarify misunderstandings and therefore can be identified as mediators (Knapp & Knapp-Potthoff 1985: 451) or brokers, a concept that I will explain in this paper. There still is not much literature on language and cultural mediators. To offer a state of research, I therefore also use studies on immigrant families whose children often act as language and cultural brokers (Antonini et al. 2017; Bauer 2016; Rajič 2008; Orellana 2010; Weisskirch 2017) or "assets of integration" (Mohamud 2017). Especially children of migrants and bilingual migrants are often seen as born translators and interpreters (see Bahadır 2010: 24). Schooling often help children to learn the languages of their host country. So, their parents expect them to understand and interpret everything, including the official language of the host country. The children often cannot live up to the numerous expectations placed on them and come under enormous psychological pressure (Rajič 2008: 146-150). The term "cultural broker" is used because of the "children's ability to navigate and negotiate between two languages and cultures in assisting their family's integration and settlement process" (Mohamud 2017: 2). This definition makes the term "cultural broker" useful for language and cultural mediators, as I will detail later in this paper. Gustafsson et al. (2019) show how child interpreters described their daily experiences brokering for their parents in the Swedish civil service, while their presence in institutions was hardly ever questioned. In their opinion, informal brokers are not bound by professional ethics, and may be biased and obliged to be loyal to their families. In reference to the knowledge of ethics, fair treatment of users and staff, and the loyalty of language brokers to their families or clients, Gustafsson et al. (2019) make a clear distinction between professional interpreting and language brokering by children.

In a similar way, professional (sworn) interpreters often consider language and cultural mediating or brokering as inferior (Pöllabauer 2005: 184). The federal association of interpreters and translators in Germany has termed the increasing interpreting services of language and cultural mediators as "rapid growing wild growth", especially in social, education and health sectors (BDÜ 2015: 1).[5] Since the 1980s, the term "language mediator" has been used for "non-professional interpreting" (Pöchhacker 2007: 10; Wohlfarth 2016: 15, 31), sometimes also termed "natural translation" to make clear that language and cultural mediators are not systematically trained or certified for their job (Pöllabauer 2005: 185). Language mediation takes place in everyday situations, in face-to-face interactions; it does not require any training; the only requisite is the knowledge of the languages to be interpreted. The

[5] Translation by the author. Original citation: „der Nährboden für einen rapide größer werdenden Wildwuchs in der Angebotslandschaft ehrenamtlicher Dolmetschdienste" (BDÜ 2015: 1).

main function is to transmit and to convey language while playing an active role as communication partner (Pöchhacker 2007: 10; Knapp & Knapp-Potthoff 1985: 451). Other studies use the term "lay interpreter" (Marics 2008: 95).

Translation between increasingly multilingual clients and police officers is one important aspect of their everyday work. Translating and interpreting between these two groups of actors often requires an interpreter as a third actor. Stanek (2011) notes lacking verifications of interpretations combined with a lack of professionalism on the part of the authorities' employees. She concludes that the quality standards of interpreting are not satisfactory for the police (Stanek 2011: 24-25). The official language principle of the German administrative procedure law prescribes *Die Amtssprache ist deutsch* 'The official language is German' (Verwaltungsverfahrensgesetz, VwVfg § 23 Abs. 1). Misleadingly this official language principle lets many officers argue that only German can be spoken in the administration. Yet, the law does not claim that there should be no interpreters. Indeed, there is no general regulation on how the authorities deal with people with little or no German language skills. Actually, nobody has the right to consult an interpreter, but there are certain legal regulations.[6] Some institutions like employment offices, for example, ask people to bring an "interpreter" along – in this way, they assume that any interpreter can do this task. Interpreting in social spaces therefore often includes the services of language and cultural mediators. If the institutions themselves commission interpreters, they often must be sworn. An entitlement to an oral, free translation exists only in the asylum procedure. According to § 17 of the Asylum Act (Asylgesetz), an interpreter must be consulted ex officio, if sufficient knowledge of German is not available. Consultation of the interpreter takes place at the expense of the authority.

In this article, I focus on a group of people who perceive and term themselves language and cultural mediators. They completed at least some further education lasting several days or month-long training, working as freelancers and are organised in three different associations. Mostly, the association of which they are a member calls them to interpret in a given situation and pays for that assignment. I distinguish these language and cultural mediators from sworn interpreters, who are also qualified to interpret in court, who spent several years studying, and who earn two or three times as much. I also distinguish them from child interpreters and other bilingual "lay" interpreters, who have had no training whatsoever, and are very often not paid at all.

3. How to become a mediator and working conditions

All three associations I visited are NGO-like, registered associations, and are funded by membership fees and funds from various ministries and offices. Two of these associations (in two different German federal states) use language and cultural mediators who took part in a 200-hour training course organised by the local Chamber of Industry and Commerce (Industrie- und Handelskammer, IHK), which guarantees a minimal professional standard and concludes with a certificate. Participants spend six months learning basic information

[6] The Federal Employment Agency, for instance, differentiates between EU nationals, third countries legally resident in the EU and non-privileged third country nationals when it comes to the use of interpreting and translation services.

about community interpreting, gaining knowledge of German institutions and talking about their experiences of migration, integration and discrimination. They are trained in personal skills, interpretation and translation techniques, exercise practical actions and get support for later professional independence. Several times a year, both of these associations provide full-day, special training courses by external lecturers from the university and state institutions.

The third association only offers a three-day training course on "Interpreting in Social Space" taught by a university professor at the university. Participants learn basic information on community interpreting, ethical standards such as professionalism, neutrality, completeness and transparency. After the course, the participants receive an admission interview and, when successful, their first assignments through their association.

The associations' services are subject to charge. Only authorities, institutions and public facilities can hire language and cultural mediators. One association obtained additional funds for private enquiries (which is free of charge for private users). The self-appointed language and cultural mediators coach and mediate between families, official authorities, associations and companies to coach and bridge information gaps.

Working as a language and cultural mediator in these three associations only generates a very small income, based on the real working hours. It means an expense allowance between ten and 35 Euros. Around the world, only some community interpreters work as full-time employees, while most are freelancers who work in different agencies, as Ozolins (2007: 121) remarks. Yet, language mediators never know when to expect their next assignment(s) or how long these will take. I met language mediators who had only about two to three assignments a year, while others had about one assignment a month. The chairperson of one association argued that it would be a disgrace to pay for the job through expense allowances, which means that most language and cultural mediators are forced to work in other professions. She complained that their services should be a valuable piece of work instead of only a cheap solution (Chairperson Association of language and cultural mediators, 19.07.2019).

Martín & Phelan (2009: 13) complain that the training courses in general do not use a standard code of practice nor unified principles on cultural mediation. According to them, confidentiality, impartiality, accuracy and professionalism should be part of cultural mediators' professional work. While Ozolins (2007: 123) complains that the majority of interpreters did not receive any training in interpreting, I observed a growing attempt at professionalisation in the sense of Martín & Phelan (2009) and increasing thoughts about normativity in translation, as I will develop further in this paper. One association, for instance, tried to obtain improved, official recognition of its certificate to professionalise the work of its mediators. The reason for this formalisation of an informal sector could be greater trustworthiness in these NGOs and their specific language mediation services in an increasingly diverse society.

4. Going along. The case study of Mariana

To illustrate the job of a language and cultural mediator, and to explain why I use brokerage as analytical category, I introduce a case study about one interpreting situation.

I met Mariana[7], who already had plenty of interpreting experience, on the first day of a training course that I visited. Originally from an Eastern European country, she immigrated to Germany in the early 2000s. Her family including her husband and three children, came two years later. After working in several jobs, Mariana finally began translating and interpreting both in professional and semi-professional contexts. As a mother of three adult children, she is now in her 50s and interprets for different institutions. On the one hand, she translates for the police regularly and officially in different monitoring measures; on the other hand, she works as a low paid language mediator in different institutions. Mariana attended two training courses, including the 200-hours of training at the IHK. Although she was struggling, but very committed, she also came to the three-days-course at the university in the hope of finding support in clarifying how to interpret, and above all how to distinguish between interpreting for official institutions like the police and social institutions like NGOs. For Mariana, interpreting for the police meant mostly interpreting surveillance measures through mobile phones and videos, while interpreting in social contexts for her often happen in highly sensitive situations (see also Sami Sauerwein 2006: 5). Mariana argued that in social contexts, she needed to be more empathetic and humane, while in a more formal context of mobile interpreting services, she was better able to distance herself from agencies and public authorities. Interestingly, she distinguished clearly between skills needed in social and more formal institutional contexts.

Shortly after the training, Mariana allowed me to accompany her to her next assignment. A few days in advance, she received an email with the exact date, time and the location to interpret during a doctor's appointment. She gave me the address and I accompanied her that day, which allowed me to experience her handling of unexpected situations and taking on more than anticipated. The following case study illustrates her effort to achieve a sensitive, friendly and very human way of interpreting.

> A very cold winter morning, 7.30 a.m. Arriving at the given address to interpret during a doctor's appointment, the language mediator Mariana finds herself in front of a big grey apartment building. She does not find a doctor's name among the numerous doorbell signs. Apart from numerous private names, only one doorbell includes the small sign of a youth emergency shelter. After taking a little bit of time to realise this new situation, Mariana rings and then steps into the shelter, talks to the social worker there and finds a young, very small and thin teenager girl named Ilana, who does not understand any German, waiting there. Mariana finds out that Ilana has to see a doctor on the other side of town. Instead of just interpreting right away, Mariana must first accompany the girl on a 15-minute walk, early in the day, and on a very cold wintry morning. Mariana is not prepared for such a long walk, and is only wearing a thin jacket without a scarf or woollen hat. She's freezing and her nose is running. While walking, the 15-year-old Ilana talks very openly about her experiences in the Eastern European country she comes from. In between, Mariana translates her story to me, always in the first

[7] Due to the assured anonymity, all names of research participants used in this paper are pseudonyms.

person singular (I-form). Ilana has only been in in Germany for a year and explains that she has been looking for protection at a police station after a chain of bad experiences, which in turn led her to the youth emergency centre. As she is unable to speak any German, she is not sure how long she can stay in the shelter and what will happen to her.

On our arrival at the doctor's office, we find ourselves in a queue of people. Suddenly, the receptionist arrives, telling everybody, that it is too late to see the doctor that day. Although it is only 8.10 a.m., and the consultation only opened at 8 a.m., we are too late. Mariana tries to insist, explaining that she is accompanying the girl who does not speak any German. She tries to get into the doctor's office to speak to the second receptionist, but in vain. Then Mariana calls the emergency shelter to insist on their intervention. Eventually, we have to leave without seeing the doctor. On the way back, Mariana stops at a drugstore and buys some handkerchiefs, gives one package to me, and two to Ilana, who smiles in response.

Back at the youth emergency shelter, Mariana takes the initiative and requests hot tea, as we are all freezing. Then the social worker, Daniel, asks us to take a seat in his office. As Mariana is on hand to interpret, he would like to take the opportunity to clarify some details, which are still unclear two months after Ilana's arrival. The language mediator explains that the girl herself seems to have questions, as she told us on the way to the doctor. Mariana continues interpreting, as she would speak herself, in the I-form.

Interestingly, most of the time, Daniel speaks in the third person singular. He talks about *the* girl and explains that they need to talk about her care. Ilana seems concerned about going back to her mother or father. For the first time since her arrival in the youth emergency shelter two months ago, Ilana can communicate in her mother tongue and is understood. Additionally, the positive atmosphere that Mariana is spreading with her encouraging smile, in connection with the tea, seems to be literally liberating for Ilana. Suddenly, Ilana starts to tell her story, full of childhood exploitation, violation and crime, beginning in her home country and continuing in Germany. The atmosphere is quiet and tense. Very soon, Mariana interrupts and explains that she has an obligation of secrecy, and confirms that nobody in the room will pass on her story. Yet, Daniel objects, that he *has* to talk about her experiences in the team and with the youth office. While I sense that the language mediator is trying to create an intimate atmosphere, favoured by tea and the security of talking in a protected setting, the social worker himself remains formal. In spite of this combination of intimacy and bureaucratic formality, the girl is talking. Several times in the following two-hour talk, Mariana asks questions in between interpreting, and tells Daniel that she has to check some details. When Ilana starts crying at one point, Mariana reacts and gives her a handkerchief and even opens the package for her. Several times during the conversation, Daniel tries to show Ilana his respect and admits that she seems to be a very courageous person. In the end, Ilana says she feels safe and appreciates the atmosphere, and claims she is happy and even lucky. When Mariana asks what exactly she means by luck, Ilana says happiness lies in little things. In the end, Mariana embraces Ilana warmly.

This case study of my explorative fieldwork with language and cultural mediators in Germany exemplifies the various tasks and duties carried out by this group of people with

whom I work. Instead of mere interpreting, we find several tasks, which would not be part of the job description, and go beyond standard requirements. Mariana needed to fetch her client, a minor girl, from her accommodation, walk across the city with her, and find the actual place of assignment on a cold wintry morning. At the doctor's office, Mariana became an active broker. Taking the role of a broker is not only situational for the mediators, it is a part of their role as such. Yet, Mariana's example shows how she engaged actively in brokerage. She chose to insist and tried several strategies to see the doctor that day. She even decided to use her own mobile phone to talk to the emergency shelter staff. She brought Ilana back afterwards. She thereby fulfilled some kind of care work; accompanying Ilana, talking to her, even giving her paper handkerchiefs. Caring for her client in that way also helps her to establish trust and credibility (Cabot 2019: 16; Tuckett 2018: 248).

Inside the youth service centre, Mariana first tried to create a pleasant, cosy and comfortable atmosphere, asked for a warm drink as well as sugar and a spoon. All these little gestures went a long way towards creating a good setting for a very difficult discussion. As we can see, the language mediator herself acts as a broker, reacting very empathically and mediating between the girl and the social worker, trying to help both to feel safe and comfortable, and solve their respective problems. She acted according to her own normative ideas and clearly took responsibility. She filled different roles – instead of being only a language mediator, she acted as a social worker (i.e. tea and handkerchiefs), as a psychologist (bringing in her own questions, being very sensitive about traumas) and a broker (bridging the two different sides of Ilana and Daniel). If we now consider that her job generates only a very small income, we see that Mariana does tasks for which she is not paid. She clearly acts as an active third party, because she works in Ilana's best interests and helps ensure that everyone understands each other. These different roles are not played out one after another, but coexist in the interpreter (Sami Sauerwein 2006: 68, 238). The case study presented here confirms several role concepts of interpreters and language mediators which Pöllabauer (2005: 76, 180, 186) and Sami Sauerwein (2006: 35ff.) cite. According to them, interpreters act as language converters, bridges, cultural brokers, experts, spokespersons, advocates, machines, managers of the conversation, helpers and as third active parties (Sami Sauerwein 2006: 171).

Although it is true that some of the tasks could have been avoided and better organised with information from the language association, Mariana chose to take over a role as broker and tried to solve the situation. Her agentive practices are related to her brokerage, a concept, which I will discuss in more detail in the next section (Koster & van Leynseele 2017: 803). Ozolins puts is as follows: "all interpreters have (at least) two clients – the two parties they are interpreting for, but not all interpreters understand they also often have a third client – the agency through which they obtain work" (Ozolins 2007: 124). This is not only a crucial aspect in terms of what the broker earns, but is also pivotal to the art of communicating with the agency as well as the "booking" institution and of course, the client. While Mariana should have translated during a doctor's appointment, it turned out that she was too late to do so that day. Instead of giving up, she insisted on treatment, and later on, switched to another

situation between the social worker and the client. These tasks could have been avoided, if the association had organised things better.

Later, Mariana told me she puts all her heart into these situations: *Das sind Einsätze, bei denen ich sehr viel Herz investiere*. 'These are assignments, where I invest a lot of my heart' (30.10.2019).[8]

5. Language and cultural mediators as brokers

Mariana's case shows that the communication partners were unable to talk to each other without the help of the language mediator and her translational activity (Knapp & Knapp-Potthoff 1985: 452). It was the language mediator, who ensured that all the parties involved understood each other. Mariana spoke for both parties and chose to act as a broker, she actively combined several aspects of this role, which is why I use the analytical advantage and strength of the broker concept. In the following part, I will analyse and interpret Mariana's case study with the help of existing literature. The concept of brokerage seems to be helpful; especially in the context of the current societal change, as brokers bring together different sites (Koster & van Leynseele 2017: 806-807). If we understand brokers as central figures in translation and mediation processes, bridging gaps and connecting the social worlds of actors who have diverging interests and unequal power relations (Koster & van Leynseele 2017: 803), we can clearly classify language and cultural mediators as brokers. As brokers, they have a relatively independent and outside third-party position (Sami Sauerwein 2006: 61; 171).

> Brokers are not part of either of the groups they represent, nor do they merge different groups into one whole; instead, they bring groups together while leaving room for difference and for their own 'independent' position. (Koster & van Leynseele 2017: 808)

Brokerage in that sense means a two-way process as well as controlling the access held by the authorities and their clients (Boissevain 1974: 147). The question of taking sides or being neutral is also relevant for the definition of the broker. While crossing social boundaries, brokers' loyalties in the process and their increasing force are questioned, especially as they are remunerated for their mediation, which reveal moral ambiguities (Lindquist 2015: 870). Boissevain (1974: 148-149) therefore describes brokers as entrepreneurs and manipulators of people and information. As brokers always work for their own profit, Boissevain (1974: 158) identifies brokerage as "business". Brokers often work on their own account (Sami Sauerwein 2006: 51). Although this discussion is interesting, it stereotypes and characterises brokers as immoral or at least morally ambiguous figures (Tuckett 2018: 246). The concept of brokerage is most fruitful when used as an analytical category and ethnographic entry point. A look into the anthropology of brokerage underlines my argument to term language and cultural mediators as brokers. So, Geertz (1960) describes the example of Javanese *kijaji*, local Muslim teachers who translate as brokers between the local community and the nation state (Geertz 1960: 228). The *kijaji* act as "cultural middlemen" (p. 229) and "specialists in communication" (p. 230)

[8] Most of the interviews for this paper were conducted in German and translated by myself.

who connect the villagers with an international culture (p. 243); which is why he terms them "cultural brokers" (p. 233). A look at this concept helps to sharpen our view of their role as mediators between two different sites and to illuminate the processes from the position of mediation (Lindquist 2015: 874).

Looking at language and cultural mediators, their degree of professionalisation might also be included in the discussion on brokerage. "The ambivalence ascribed to interpreters […] is also epistemic: they have knowledge that no one else can access, and those being 'spoken for' are left to trust (or to distrust) the interpreter's capacity and willingness to convey this knowledge" (Cabot 2019: 5). As Cabot (2019) states, it is not just the fact that interpreters act as agents and brokers which make it interesting, but also the ways in which they use their brokering activities. Based on the example of community brokers in Italy who offer assistance and advice in immigration, Tuckett (2018) analyses their desire for improving their own employment chances, their professionalism and their social status. Instead of negative stereotyping, Tuckett explains their ethical motivation and frames their community brokerage as a means of overcoming their own marginalised position as migrants (pp. 247, 253, 261). Tuckett (2018) sees them as "key figures in today's highly bureaucratised global migration regime" (p. 246). As Murphy (1981: 667) states, brokers try to convince others that their knowledge is exclusive and special. Their role is privileged and therefore powerful, sometimes even dangerous, as he explains using the example of local brokers who have the power to threaten people (p. 673).

Language and cultural mediators like Mariana translate and interpret not only language, but also aspects of "culture", emotion, feelings, trust and mistrust (see also Cabot 2019: 2). While Ilana is understood in her own language by someone else for the first time and can explain the complex background of her story in an understandable way, Mariana alternates between German and the Eastern European language they have in common in her conversations with Ilana. Mariana later told me that Ilana used a relatively simple language, which indicates her low school attendance and simple origins. She explained her background in cultural terms and claimed to interpret as cultural broker; which I will develop further in the following sections. During the conversation, Mariana asked Ilana for further details in interim discussions to help both Daniel and Ilana to understand each other. At the end of the conversation, Ilana's needs became clear and further steps necessary to organise her care were discussed.

6. Thinking about normativity in translation

The federal association of interpreters and translators in Germany has called for a professionalisation of interpreting for non-professionals (BDÜ 2015: 2). In the following section, I reflect on who is interpreting, recalling the critics from literature, professional interpreting associations and sworn interpreters (BDÜ 2015) about the non-professionalism of lay interpreters and language mediators. As I stated, the language and cultural mediators I work with are really interested in further education courses on interpreting and translating. My explorative fieldwork suggests that as more and more specific training courses by language and cultural mediators arise, they refer increasingly to ethics in their work. Several interpreters mentioned the importance

of translating everything, not only words, but also emotions. If a person cries, the interpreter has to cry as well. If someone laughs, the interpreter has to laugh as well. These descriptions show the increasing professionalisation of language mediators who are referred to in literature as "lay interpreters" (see Marics 2008: 122). To support my argument, Mariana translated in the first person singular – as if she were speaking herself. This is taught in professional interpreter training, which is a more professional way of interpreting (Knapp & Knapp-Potthoff 1985). Meanwhile, the demand for interpreting as passive and invisible machine is being questioned, reconsidered and even seems to be illusory in interpreting studies (Sami Sauerwein 2006: 41). When I took part in the three-day training course for language mediators, interpreting led to heated discussions among the participants. Some of them explained the necessity to interpret in the I-form, whilst others strongly opposed the practice. During the coffee breaks and in the seminar, the participants discussed normativity amongst interpreters and language mediators. Some of the participants said that interpreting in the third person singular automatically leads to a commented version of what has been said, and only a direct transfer offers neutrality and professionalism.

As an example, I quote quite an experienced language mediator, who argued in favour of intervening in some situations:

> No, I feel quite uncomfortable interpreting in the first person. Especially if several persons are talking, it is useful to know who said what. […] Last time, I had a case at an NGO. A five-year-old boy was diagnosed as not intelligent and retarded. The social worker discussed the problems in front of the little boy and his parents. I noticed that I was interpreting less and less loudly and very quietly until I felt compelled to intervene. I kindly asked the social worker, if it would be possible for the boy to wait outside. I argued that the boy was aware of everything, and it might hurt him. Actually, I even felt it was my duty to intervene. Luckily, the caseworker agreed, so the mother waited outside with her son. (Language mediator, 15.11.2019)[9]

The normative aspect here is not simply a question of interpreting in the first or in the third person singular. This quote again underlines the emic understanding of the need to intervene to meet personal normative ideals about morality and ethics. The language mediator in this situation is a third person without any relationship to the other actors and represents a true third party (Knapp & Knapp-Potthoff 1985). As she is outside of the interaction, she has the role of an outsider – and is aware of something that neither caseworkers nor parents notice. By taking sides for the silent young boy, she is more than a broker; one could argue that she acts as an active, committed anthropologist (see Kellett 2009: 23). Instead

[9] Original citation in German: *Nein, ich fühle mich eher unwohl in der ersten Person Singular zu dolmetschen. Besonders wenn mehrere Menschen im Raum sind, ist es nützlich zu wissen, wer was gesagt hat. Vor kurzem hatte ich zum Beispiel einen Fall in einer NGO, in dem es um die niedrige Intelligenz und Zurückgebliebenheit eines fünfjährigen Jungen ging. Die Sachbearbeiter diskutierten die Probleme vor dem Jungen und seinen Eltern. Ich merkte, dass ich immer leiser und leiser dolmetschte, bis ich mich gezwungen sah, einzugreifen. Ich fragte den Sachbearbeiter ob es möglich wäre, dass der Junge draußen wartet, da er alles mitbekomme und dies für ihn nicht gut sei oder ihn es sogar verletzen könnte. Tatsächlich habe ich es sogar als meine Pflicht gesehen, einzugreifen. Glücklicherweise stimmte der Sachbearbeiter zu und die Mutter wartete draußen mit ihrem Sohn.*

of merely interpreting language, she actively engages with her own normative ideals and protects the child from hearing harmful things and makes her own suggestions for changing the multilingual care situation.

7. Claiming cultural interpretation and translation concepts

When I spoke to several of Mariana's colleagues, I learnt that most of them have migration experiences. The majority of them had been in Germany since the early 2000s, when there were no integration courses at all.[10] They said that some of them had suffered for years and had worked out everything for themselves. One language mediator told me, that she never went out without a dictionary during that time. Today, however, most refugees receive much help; they are allowed to participate in German language courses, they get health care and the best chances of integration (group interview 19.07.2019). In the interviews, the language and cultural mediators emphasised their bicultural backgrounds and told me that they view themselves as specialists in their respective "culture", claiming to be able to interpret social phenomena as expressions of specific "cultures". In the language mediators' view, interpreting is not only about language. To quote another interpreter I spoke to:

> It is all about culture. There is always a gap. It's not only language. It is important to understand the culture. You look with your German eye through a German lens at a Syrian problem. […] I understand the culture. So, I understand who is lying. (Language mediator, 10.07.2019)[11]

This quote shows that this language mediator considers herself an expert because of her affiliation with the Syrian "culture". Interestingly, she uses the body metaphors "lens" and "eye". As a German and with a German body, it might not be possible to understand the Syrian "culture". She thereby inscribes "culture" into the body. Exemplarily, this interviewed language mediator pinpoints why other members of her "culture" confuse certain data with authorities, and become implicated in implausible statements. Interestingly, she seems to feel responsible for assessing the veracity of statements. During her search for the lie, she implicitly follows the bureaucratic logic of the organisations for which she works, resulting in a complicit positioning towards the state. This strategy also seems to be practised among interpreters in Greece, who claim to be able to investigate the origin of their clients by examining the language and knowledge of their expected "culture", as Cabot (2019: 18) states. Her emic translation theory includes the necessity to understand the "culture", which would only be possible through the personification of the same "culture" as the client's.

Several other interpreters told me that one needs cultural mediation because of the cultural sensitivity of language. They referred to the example of the need to accurately translate figurative and verbose Arabic expressions of thanks. While professional interpreters – in

[10] They were first implemented on 1 January 2005 with the new German Immigration Act (*Zuwanderungsgesetz*). For the first time, the state provided legal regulated integration services for immigrants. Integration courses consist of a language course and an orientation course about the legal system, the history and the "culture" in Germany (BAMF 2015: 6).

[11] This interview was conducted in English.

their view – might only translate "thank you", cultural mediators would interpret the unusual and not target-like formulations of the Arabic-speaking clients and thus the "culture" of expressing thanks (see also Sami Sauerwein 2006: 46). One language mediator explained that the precise interpretation is necessary, as cultural mediation has to happen. If a person expresses thanks in Arabic, one has to interpret it precisely: "Your hands should hold gold" and so on. Otherwise, the "culture" is lacking (Language mediator, 19.07.2019; see also 13.08.2019).

Furthermore, language and cultural mediators present themselves as particularly effective towards authorities as they understand all those involved, another language mediator explained when asked about a case she was working on. She insisted on understanding both sides, the view of the migrant mother as well as the German officer. Later on, she again differentiated between the mother's view and the view of a migrant mother, which she could also understand. Her case was about a single mother of four children, in her mid-40s who was in the youth welfare office because her younger children did not always attend school. The youth welfare officer was in her early 30s, and pointed out her opposite need to fulfil her duties as a mother and ensure that she took the initiative when her children could not go to school. Instead of sending her own children to call the school, she was supposed to sign them off. The migrant mother was intimidated and as the young welfare officer could have been her daughter. She avoided eye contact and seemed to ignore the young clerk. The language mediator described the case to me and emphasised that she understood both the view of a mother who does not act according to the law, and the view of the migrant, for whom as an illiterate it is a great challenge to deal with an authority in a foreign language. These and other examples convinced her that it was necessary to intervene and mediate cultural knowledge:

> In the role of a mother, I see that the woman has to act and that it is her task, as the German view shows. On the other hand, I see that the woman is illiterate and that it is a great challenge for her to call a foreign authority in a foreign language. We should intervene there and beyond the role of language mediator or even out of the role of translation. I am also a cultural mediator and broker. Then I say: May I briefly mention ... Here, the reason for the woman's action lies in the fact that... [...] In another case where the father attacked his son, I have to explain: That is a cultural misunderstanding. There are children's rights here, it is different here and it is a good thing. [...] Such cases occur every day and we are enriched by them. (language and cultural mediator, 13.08.2019)[12]

Taking not only the example of the illiterate mother, but also one example of a punishing father who did not respect children's rights, the cited language mediator explained her need

[12] Original citation in German: *In der Rolle als Mutter sehe ich, dass die Frau handeln muss und es auch ihre Aufgabe darstellt, wie dies die deutsche Sicht zeigt. Auf der anderen Seite sehe ich, dass die Frau Analphabetin ist und es für sie eine große Überwindung ist, in einer fremden Sprache in einer fremden Behörde anzurufen. Da müsste man eingreifen, und raus der Rolle der Sprachmittler, bzw. sogar raus aus der Rolle der Übersetzung gehen. Ich bin auch Kulturmittlerin und Mediatorin. Dann sage ich: Darf ich mal kurz erwähnen... Hier, der Grund für das Handeln der Frau liegt darin, dass… […] In einem anderen Fall, wo der Vater seinen Sohn angegriffen hat, muss ich erklären: Das ist ein kulturelles Missverständnis. Hier gibt es Kinderrechte, hier ist es anders und es ist gut so. Solche Fälle kommen alltäglich vor, und wir sind dafür bereichernd.*

to intervene and act as mediator of cultural understanding. This emic understanding of translation and intervention underlines people's self-conception as brokers and mediators. Due to their cultural expertise, they see themselves as enriching both sides. By highlighting the relevance of intervention, the cited language mediator clearly argues in favour of using personal normative ideals. Using the example of switching between and understanding different roles, the language mediator argues that both the mother and the German officer should be understood. She explains the need to intervene and the need for children's rights as well as the moral implications for her clients.

In several German federal states, language and cultural mediators have joined forces to create associations with as many languages as possible. I quote the chairperson of such an association:

> In the beginning, it was a cheap solution to use language and cultural mediators, but it is actually a valuable piece of work. Only language and cultural mediators can authentically grasp cultural determinants. That is a huge difference to professional interpreters! They translate literally (and may be good for translating complex papers), but language and cultural mediators provide content translations. This avoids conflicts. Language and cultural mediators always come from the same culture. It's about language and culture. (Association chairwoman of language and cultural mediators, 19.07.2019)[13]

Her idea of "culture" and her concept of translation, which should always be "culture"-specific, point to the great importance that the club chairperson attaches to language and cultural mediation. She argues similar to Vermeer (1986), who describes translation as "cultural transfer". "It is probably not enough to understand oneself as a mere (language?) mediator. You also have to be a cultural mediator" (Vermeer 1986: 52, translation by the author). Through their common-sense use of the concept of "culture" and their claim to be able to interpret social phenomena culturally, one could term the language and cultural mediators "para-ethnologists" (Beek & Bierschenk 2020, Holmes & Marcus 2006; Islam 2015). Holmes and Marcus (2006), who remarked that even economists make their decisions based on empirical data and related social actors rather than using only quantitative, technical and econometric data, first observed this phenomenon named "para-ethnography". The "para-ethnographers" use and interpret empirical knowledge of other actors in doing ethnographic research (see also Beek & Bierschenk 2020: 6). Beek and Bierschenk (2020: 1) show in their special issue the practice of using the category "culture" in bureaucratic interactions, meaning both bureaucrats and their clients. Their use of the category "culture" is similar to the use of the term in classical ethnography, when "culture" in "primitive societies" was considered stable, self-evident and given (to name just two of several, see for example Evans-Pritchard's (1937/1963) book "Witchcraft, oracles, and magic among *the* Azande" and Mead (1949)

[13] Original citation in German: *Am Anfang war das eine billige Lösung, Sprach- und Kulturmittler zu verwenden, aber eigentlich ist das eine wertvolle Arbeit. Nur Sprach- und Kulturmittler können kulturelle Bestimmheiten authentisch erfassen. Das ist ein riesengroßer Unterschied zu Übersetzern! Diese übersetzen wortwörtlich (und sind vielleicht gut für die Übersetzung von komplizierten Texten), Sprach- und Kulturmittler aber liefern inhaltliche Übersetzungen. So vermeidet man Konflikte. Sprach- und Kulturmittler kommen immer aus der gleichen Kultur. Es geht um Sprache und Kultur.*

about the "primitive youth" *in* Samoa (emphasis by the author). While the anthropology of the 1990s queries or even avoids the term "culture" as an explanation of social phenomena (see Abu-Lughod 1991), cultural and language mediators like the bureaucrats that Beek and Bierschenk (2020) refer to, use it explicitly.

> However, while anthropologists have become uncomfortable with the term, bureaucrats themselves have turned toward 'culture' as an explicatory category. […] [T]hey generate specialised knowledge on cultural others, relying on expert interviews, cultural mediators and observations. While nowadays bureaucrats themselves may be the object of anthropological research, they themselves produce cultural analysis. (Beek & Bierschenk 2020: 2)

In the same sense, it is possible to see cultural and language mediators as para-ethnologists. They explicitly refer to their knowledge of "culture" and use it as a category of explanation. One language mediator placed "culture" in the body, as I cited earlier. "Culture", as used by the interviewees, remains somehow static, fixed and therefore non-changeable.

8. Conclusion

Based on my explorative fieldwork in two German federal states, my paper shows the working conditions of language and cultural mediators, whose interpreting services are used by numerous institutions. I analyse language and cultural mediators as brokers, who bridge different views and mediate between state officials and their clients, but also work for their own profit (Boissevain 1974; Martín & Phelan 2009: 12). As brokers they use their own normative ideals in their interactions and actively participate in reflection on normativity in translation. Going into detail with one longer case study about interpreting in a social context, my paper focuses on these aspects of brokerage as well as emic translation theories and notions of "culture". Most of the language and cultural mediators I work with have migration experience and therefore see themselves as specialists in their respective "cultures". Due to their claim to be able to interpret social phenomena "culturally", I also identify them as "para-ethnologists" (Beek & Bierschenk 2020). They explicitly refer to their knowledge of "culture" and use it as category of explanation, which is similar to the use of the term in classical ethnography. They thus act as "para-ethnologists". While anthropologists today almost reject the term "culture" for explaining social spaces (Beek & Bierschenk 2020), this concept is widely used by language and cultural mediators, which brings "culture" back into discussion.

The work of language and cultural mediators is often voluntary and their profession is not formally recognised. Yet, according to the growing number of specialised training courses and the increasing registration of different networks and associations, there is a growing institutionalisation of their brokerage. Explaining their increasing thoughts on morality, ethics and their desire for professionalism, my paper suggests taking their work seriously. My findings may appear quite ambiguous – while the language and cultural mediators and their associations adopt emblems of a professional interpreting profile, they distinguish themselves from them, for example, by avoiding the I-form, and by showing solidarity

with their clients' "culture". It seems to be a different form of professionalism of sworn interpreters, but not less professional as such when it comes to skills and competences. They are convinced that their bicultural background combined with their personification of "culture" helps to clarify misunderstandings and to understand their clients' "culture". Most of my interlocutors present themselves as enriching for both sides, as bridges of different perspectives and varying cultural backgrounds. At the same time, they show simultaneous complicity with the state authorities, as they are able to understand and "know who is lying".

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