

## *Empowering Multiculturalism: Community Interpreter Training Programme*

Akiko Sato, Kyoto University of Foreign Studies, Japan

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores what the Community Interpreter Training Program should provide its objectives, features, assessment methods, and benefits. The program's core mission is to cultivate interpreters who play an indispensable role in multicultural societies by elevating students' language proficiency and communication skills fostering multicultural coexistence. A distinctive facet of this program is its adoption of a multilingual and multicultural approach, providing students with opportunities to refine their communication skills across diverse cultural backgrounds and enhancing their interpretative capabilities in various contexts. Furthermore, proficiency tests evaluate and impartially gauge students' language competencies, enabling tailored learning plans to address individual strengths and weaknesses. The program's sponsorship offers numerous advantages, including the elevation of the university's brand recognition through proficiency tests, the enhancement of overall education quality by customizing it to each student's aptitudes, and continuous curriculum enhancements guided by test outcomes. In conclusion, the Community Interpreter Training Program represents a pivotal initiative poised to contribute substantially to multicultural societies. The introduction of proficiency tests and the comprehensive deployment of the Community Interpreter Study Group will fortify multilingual education and further promote contributions to multicultural coexistence. This program equips students with vital skills for promoting multicultural coexistence, nurturing social connections, and playing pivotal societal roles.

Keywords: Community Interpreting, Community Interpreter Training Program, Language Proficiency Test

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## **Introduction**

In today's globalised world, the movement of people across borders is commonplace and societies are more diverse than ever before. While this diversity brings affluence, it also brings challenges, particularly in communication. The right that many people take for granted to receive the services they need can be severely hampered by language barriers. This problem affects not only the people concerned, but also the cohesion and functionality of the community as a whole. The Community Interpreter Training Programme aims to tackle these issues head-on and plays a crucial role in promoting multicultural conviviality by training interpreters to facilitate communication in a variety of settings.

The aim of this paper is to explore the different aspects of community interpreter training programmes and to identify their objectives, main features, evaluation methods and the benefits they bring to both individuals and communities. In doing so, it aims to emphasise the programme's essential role in developing a class of interpreters who are not merely linguistically competent, but also culturally sensitive communicators who are able to skillfully navigate the complexities of a multicultural society.

The first Chapter of this paper discusses the “needs for community interpreters” in multicultural societies, including Japan, and gives examples of how the terminology used for the concept of 'community interpreting' differs slightly from country to country, and discusses the importance of community interpreter training programmes.

The second Chapter discusses the Community Interpreter Training Programme implemented by the University and considers what points should be kept in mind when the Community Interpreter Training Programme is incorporated into the curriculum of a higher education institution such as a university, by introducing the results of a questionnaire conducted after the students who actually took the Advanced Community Interpreting I course. The results of a questionnaire conducted after the students had given their informed consent will be presented and discussed.

In the third Chapter, as a discussion, the improvements and benefits and impacts of the University's interpreter training programme in the development of pre-sessional classes are described.

In the conclusion, the notes in the Community Interpreter Training Programme and directions on how to improve the programme for its continuation are discussed.

## **1. Needs for Community Interpreters**

### **1.1 Definition of Community Interpreting**

Community interpreters are important bridges in multicultural societies, enabling migrants and foreign residents to access public services inaccessible due to language barriers. These services cover a wide range of areas, including healthcare, education, social welfare, administration and justice (Kyoto University of Foreign Studies, 2023, Teams).

The International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) defines community interpreting as “two-way interpreting that takes place in communication between speakers of different languages to access community services” (ISO, 2014, p.2).

This definition emphasises that community interpreting has a broad scope that includes not only social services but also assistance to tourists and disaster victims.

## **1.2 Different Names for Community Interpreting in Different Countries**

It is important to point out that the regional diversity is closely related to the cultural and social needs of the respective societies when people call the services of community interpreting as follows: Public service interpreting in the United Kingdom, Community interpreting in the United States, Liaison interpreting in South Africa, Language and cultural/Integration mediation in Germany, Social setting interpreting in France and others. Therefore, Names for interpreting services reflect the specific linguistic and cultural challenges faced by each region (Tipton and Furmanek: 2016, p.3). For example, in some countries, the focus on integration of migrants and refugees has led to the naming and focus of such services as “integration mediation”. Others may focus on removing language barriers, particularly in accessing public and social services.

Furthermore, this diversity shows that, despite sharing the same basic mission - ensuring that language is not a barrier to accessing services - interpreting services should be provided in accordance with the specific challenges and needs faced by each region. It shows that there are different understandings of how interpreting services should be provided and what skills interpreters should have. This may lead to regional differences in the content and approach to interpreter education.

Therefore, it is essential for language service providers and interpreters to have a deep understanding of the local context of the services they offer and the social role they play. This understanding plays a key role in helping them respond more effectively to community needs and build language and cultural bridges. This local diversity and specific needs must also be taken into account in the design and implementation of professional training programmes.

## **1.3 Community Interpreters Needed in a Multicultural Society**

Community interpreting is becoming increasingly important in a rapidly growing multicultural society. Unlike conference interpreting, which often focuses on international, professional-level communication, community interpreting provides an important bridge between public service providers and diverse populations, including migrants and foreign residents. This fundamental difference in audience highlights the unique challenges and objectives faced by community interpreters, who must consider not only linguistic issues but also cultural, social and power relations (KUFS, 2023. p.1).

It is important to emphasise that the unique challenges faced by community interpreters involve more than simply facilitating interlanguage communication. These challenges include developing a deep intercultural understanding and sensitivity, as well as being sensitive to the personal experiences and backgrounds of the interpreting audience. Community interpreters do not simply translate messages into other languages, but also play a role in promoting mutual understanding between people from different cultural backgrounds (Yoshida et al., 2019).

Removing language barriers in accessing public services is also essential to ensure equal service provision and promote social inclusion. In this regard, community interpreters provide important support to migrants and foreign residents to enable them to function as full

members of the community. This includes not only access to basic services such as healthcare, legal and education, but also ensuring that these individuals understand their rights and have opportunities for self-realisation (ISO, 2014, p.2).

Furthermore, the training and education of community interpreters needs to go beyond technical skills. They need to ensure linguistic accuracy, as well as the ability to read and respond appropriately to cultural subtleties. This requires an environment in which interpreters can continue to hone their skills by being provided with opportunities for ongoing education and practice (ISO, 2014, p.2).

In summary, the role of community interpreters in a multicultural society goes beyond the mere transmission of information between different languages, and involves an important role as a bridge between different cultures. In order to fulfil this responsibility, interpreters must have cultural understanding and sensitivity in addition to advanced linguistic skills.

#### **1.4 Community Interpreting Versus Conference Interpreting**

Community interpreting is inherently interactive and facilitates two-way communication involving highly personal and sensitive issues. This is in contrast to the monologue-like nature of conference interpreting, where the flow of information is generally in one direction. Furthermore, community interpreting often involves consecutive interpretation and two-way translation, and is able to address a wider range of languages, including those of ethnic minorities. Conference interpreting, on the other hand, leans towards simultaneous interpretation, which reflects the official and international context and prioritises official languages (Mizuno et al., 2011, p.161).

#### **1.5 Community Interpreter Training Programme**

The Community Interpreter Training Programme is designed to train interpreters to facilitate communication between service providers and recipients from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This mission is rooted in the understanding that effective communication is more than simply translating words from one language to another. It requires an understanding of cultural nuances, the ability to convey meaning in different contexts accurately, and a commitment to ethical principles (Aichi Prefectural University, 2022).

The programme focuses on taking students' language skills to a professional level, improving their communication skills and developing their understanding of cultural dynamics. This comprehensive approach prepares graduates to handle complex real-world interpreting scenarios, from medical consultations and legal procedures to educational settings and social services. In doing so, the programme contributes to its participants' personal and professional development and plays a vital role in building a more inclusive society.

The training programme is characterised by several key features, including a curriculum that covers a wide range of interpreting contexts, forms of interpreting (e.g., consecutive, simultaneous, and sight translation), and specialisations (e.g., legal, medical, and educational interpreting). The programme also emphasises the importance of ethical considerations and cultural competence and prepares students to handle sensitive information with discretion and respect for diversity.

Assessment methods within the programme are designed to assess students' proficiency in both source and target language, their ability to communicate messages accurately and effectively across cultural boundaries, and their adherence to professional and ethical standards. These assessments take various forms, including practical interpreting exercises, written tests, and reflective assignments that encourage students to engage critically with their role as intercultural mediators (Naito, 2013, pp.31-56).

The Community Interpreter Training Programme is a beacon of hope in this multicultural world. Its mission to develop skilled interpreters who foster multiculturalism is more relevant today than ever. With a comprehensive curriculum, rigorous assessment methods, and a focus on ethical and cultural competence, the programme prepares students for a career in interpreting and assists them in advancing their careers as interpreters.

## **2. Kyoto University of Foreign Studies Community Interpreter Training Programme**

### **2.1 Community Interpreter Training Programmes Integrated Into the Curriculum**

The Kyoto University of Foreign Studies' Community Interpreters Training Program related to the ISO certification programme is currently considered to include the following requirements as of February 2024:

- (1) Foreign language proficiency: CEFR B2 level or above. Language proficiency test (90 minutes) in several languages: Date and frequency to be determined. Student year taking tests: voluntary.
- (2) Classroom study: 2 courses and 4 credits. This subject is classified as an advanced-level subject. "Community Interpreting Study I and II", for the 3rd year students and above in all departments of the Kyoto University of Foreign Studies.
- (3) Interpreting practice: 60 hours. Students report on activities (paid or unpaid) that they have sought out on their own. The teacher in charge approves this, with the proof of supervision.

The curriculum covers a wide range of topics, from international standards and disaster management to specific social issues such as healthcare, education, and justice. This wide range of subjects is designed to prepare students for the many situations they will encounter as community interpreters. The programme also strongly emphasizes practical experience (KUFS, 2023a).

The programme aligns with Kyoto University's broad educational mission to develop humanistic leaders who can contribute to international peace and understanding. With an emphasis on advanced language skills, digital literacy, and the ability to promote multicultural conviviality, the programme develops students to be effective mediators in a globalised world. The ultimate goal is to equip future generations with the skills and sensitivities necessary to thrive and contribute to a multicultural society (KUFS, 2023b).

## **3. Community Interpreting Study I From the Perspective of Students**

### **3.1 Benefits and Impact**

The benefits of the Community Interpreter Training Programme extend far beyond individual participants. Those who complete the programme play an indispensable role in their communities, ensuring that those with language barriers, who would otherwise be

marginalised, receive the needed services. That enhances the quality of life of individuals and contributes to the social and economic well-being of the community as a whole.

Furthermore, by promoting multicultural co-existence and understanding, the programme helps to build a more cohesive society. The interpreters trained through the programme are not just language specialists but ambassadors of cultural understanding who bridge gaps and facilitate dialogue in diverse communities (Sato, 2024a).

### **3.2 Analysis of the Questionnaire for Students and Non-students of Community Interpreting Study I With Informed Consent**

#### **3.2.1 Questionnaire for Students Who Took Community Interpreting Study I**

A comprehensive questionnaire with informed consent was administered in the Community Interpreting Studies I course at Kyoto University of Foreign Studies to gauge students' interest, understanding and motivation regarding community interpreting. Based on the data collected, this chapter delves into the students' attributes, motivations for enrolment, depth of understanding gained, future aspirations and overall impressions of the course. This analysis aims to determine the effectiveness of community interpreting education and its impact on student's academic and professional perspectives.

The course attracted students from foreign language faculties, with English and American departments accounting for the majority (70%). Interest, albeit small, also came from other faculties, such as German and Russian. This diversity highlights the broad appeal of community interpreting across linguistic disciplines.

When asked why they registered, opinions were divided, with 43% of students saying they were genuinely interested in community interpreting and a similar proportion saying they registered to gain credits. Significantly, some students were influenced by the instructor's good reputation or recommendations from other teachers. This division suggests a need to clarify further the intrinsic value and career potential of community interpreting and increase the number of genuinely interested students in the field.

Post-course feedback showed that 95% of participants reported a greater understanding of community interpreting, suggesting that the course went beyond mere language translation and effectively demystified the field. Participants learnt about the practical role of community interpreters and highlighted the importance of adaptability and cultural sensitivity in communication. These observations confirm the success of the course in broadening students' perspectives on the nuances of community interpreting.

Future interest in pursuing a career in community interpreting varied, with only 20% of students expressing strong interest and a significant majority (62%) still deciding. This uncertainty indicates that the curriculum provides opportunities to demonstrate further the relevance and fulfilment of a career in community interpreting.

Student feedback on Community Interpreting Studies was overwhelmingly positive, with many appreciating the dynamic and interactive learning environment. The course was also praised for its comprehensive approach, covering not only technical interpreting skills but also the ethical and cultural aspects of the profession. Suggestions for this course's future

included including more advanced interpreting classes and teaching that would cater to both enthusiastic and credit-bearing students.

The insights from the survey point to several areas for future research, including developing advanced interpreting courses tailored to students' preferences, tailoring course content to balance professional training and academic demands, and creating an environment for students to become community interpreters. These research areas are crucial in refining curricula and support structures for students aspiring to become community interpreters.

Valuable insights were gained into students' motivations, experiences and aspirations in community interpreting education. Positive feedback and constructive suggestions emphasise the importance of continuous curricular enhancement to meet student needs and industry demands. As Kyoto University of Foreign Studies strives to develop future leaders in multiculturalism, improving the community interpreter training programme will remain a crucial focus (Sato, 2024a).

### **3.2.2 Questionnaire for Students Who Did Not Take Community Interpreting Study I**

A questionnaire with informed consent was conducted to gather insights on students' awareness and engagement with community interpreting. The survey carried out after obtaining informed consent, received 83 responses from students across various departments, predominantly from the Department of English and American Languages. The respondents included students from different academic years, primarily Japanese native speakers, followed by Chinese, English, Spanish, and Portuguese.

Key findings include:

- Respondents have yet to take the course “Advanced Community Interpreting”.
- A significant majority, 63 respondents, need to become more familiar with the term “community interpreter”, while 20 respondents have some limited awareness.

Few are aware of community interpreting, and few have direct exposure to the field. Only three have seen community interpreting in action, and only one student has provided community interpreting services for a fee. Engagement with community interpreting is minimal. Only two students in their fourth year of postgraduate studies offer community interpreting services for free.

The data suggests a pressing need to increase awareness and understanding of community interpreting among students early in their academic careers, particularly before they reach their senior year when they are eligible to take specialized courses on the subject. The Community Interpreter Training Programme aims to achieve academic success and equip students with the skills and ethics necessary to contribute positively to a multicultural society.

The programme emphasizes fostering social connections and developing cultural understanding, preparing students to be ambassadors of cultural sensitivity and mutual respect. Graduates are expected to be crucial in bridging cultural gaps, promoting inclusive dialogue, and facilitating harmonious coexistence among diverse communities.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the Community Interpreter Training Programme is a holistic approach to meeting the multifaceted demands of a multicultural society. Through the strategic integration of proficiency testing and the establishment of study groups, the programme promotes multilingual education and champions the cause of multicultural co-existence.

The programme equips students with the skills, knowledge and ethical understanding necessary to make a meaningful contribution to society.

Therefore, the Community Interpreter Training Programme at Kyoto University of Foreign Studies represents a progressive response to the growing need for skilled interpreters who can deal with the complexities of multicultural communication.

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