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# Contextualizing Interpreter Training in Africa: Two Case Studies from Kenya

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## Abstract

This article explores the potential and limitations of interpreter training in Africa. It considers relevant features of the context, namely, the kind of multilingualism that characterizes postcolonial societies (with a coexistence of official, national, regional and vehicular languages within the same geographic space), and the social and geographic distribution of these languages within and across countries. My argument is based on two different interpreter training initiatives implemented in Kenya between 2010 and 2015: a Master's degree program in conference interpreting for Kenyan and international students with English, French and/or Swahili; and a Certificate program in community interpreting for refugees from Somalia and members of the Kenyan Somali community. The limitations of the programs illustrate the need for a nuanced, contextualized and diversified approach to interpreter training in Africa, and the risks of a one-size-fits-all understanding of interpreting.

Keywords: interpreter training, Kenya, community interpreting, public service interpreting

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# Contextualizing Interpreter Training in Africa: Two Case Studies from Kenya

Several initiatives to train interpreters and professionalize the language sector have sprung up in Africa over the past decade. The most important of these, the Pan-African Masters Consortium in Interpretation and Translation (PAMCIT),<sup>2</sup> was launched by the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) in 2009 (Delgado Luchner, 2019) and today includes six universities in different regions of the continent. Additional localized initiatives have been established to train community interpreters. The pilot training course of the PAMCIT was launched at the University of Nairobi in collaboration with the University of Geneva. Several years later, a community interpreting course was implemented at Kenyatta University, once again in collaboration with the University of Geneva. In this article, I draw lessons from these two initiatives, in order to contribute to the growing debate around whether and how one can (or should) formalize interpreting practices in Africa. My focus is on the training of interpreters in and for the African context, using the Kenyan programs as case studies. As such, it does not provide a comprehensive overview of existing interpreting practices or training programs in Africa but rather presents recommendations based on past experiences.

My analysis draws on two key assumptions that have shaped the field of interpreting studies: the idea that conference and community interpreting are two separate professional categories (Pöchhacker, 2015), and the association of community interpreting with migrants and minorities (Hale, 2015). These assumptions are of limited relevance in the African context, which presents a very different brand of multilingualism than the one historically associated with European nation-states (Blommaert, 2009). Indeed, the coexistence of official, vehicular and local languages in the same geographical space that is typical of many sub-Saharan African countries (Djité, 2008; Mazrui, 2004) has implications for multilingual communication practices (Marais, 2014) and, consequently, for interpretation and interpreter training in Africa (Mazrui, 2016). Contextualizing interpreter training therefore implies training interpreters not only in Africa, but according to African countries' needs.

In this article I present an analysis of the relevant literature and context, followed by two narrative summaries of the training case studies. These are then analyzed in light of the literature and the language situation in Kenya, in order to derive more general training recommendations.

## 1. Key Assumptions and Definitions

*Interpreting* is an umbrella term that describes oral language mediation practices spanning a variety of settings (courtrooms, hospitals, conferences) and techniques (sentence-by-sentence, consecutive, simultaneous).<sup>3</sup> Two main professional groups have emerged from this multiplicity of practices: community interpreters, who mostly

<sup>2</sup> See <http://pamcit.org>.

<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive list of interpreting settings and techniques, see Pöchhacker (2015, p. xxviii).

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## Contextualizing Interpreter Training in Africa

work using dialogue interpreting (sentence-by-sentence) or consecutive techniques, and conference interpreters, who today work mainly in simultaneous and only occasionally in consecutive mode.<sup>4</sup> The literature sometimes distinguishes ‘court interpreting’ as a separate professional category (Angelelli, 2004; Mikkelsen, 2000). This distinction is meaningful in countries where specific accreditation procedures are in place for court interpreters; however, as far as the techniques used are concerned, court interpreting can be understood as a subcategory of community interpreting (Hale, 2015). In most countries, conference and community interpreting are not regulated. Consequently, many practicing interpreters have not undergone formal training. The proportion of untrained interpreters is higher in community than conference settings, because most international organizations employing conference interpreters rely on accreditation procedures and require formal training.

Not surprisingly, the creation of modern interpreter training programs in universities has largely been driven by the needs of these large employers: The first was founded in Geneva in 1941, initially with a view to training interpreters for the League of Nations and later the United Nations (Moser-Mercer, 2005), and many others have followed in the decades since, most of them located in Europe and catering to the increasingly diverse language needs of the European Union.<sup>5</sup> Until recently, conference interpreting research has focused mainly on Western contexts, and, to a lesser extent, Russia (or the USSR) and China. Studies of conference interpreting in Africa are a relatively new and rare phenomenon (see, e.g., Delgado Luchner, 2019; Ndongo-Keller, 2015; Wallmach, 2002). In community interpreting research, non-Western contexts remain equally marginal, and are generally only alluded to insofar as interpreted events in the West might involve migrants from these contexts (Angelelli, 2008; Blommaert, 2001; Inghilleri, 2005; Maryns, 2013; Pöllabauer, 2004). Thus, the current academic understanding of interpreting has largely emerged from a context in which conference interpreting is used in interactions between representatives of different states or speakers of different official languages within a state, whereas community interpreting is framed mainly in relation to migrants (Hale, 2015). The language needs for conference and community interpreting often differ, which means that interpreters’ language profiles are relevant to one context but not another. This further entrenches the divide between the two categories of interpreters.

The distinction between community and conference interpreting permeates the field, both in terms of training and of research, even though the two professions do not differ fundamentally in the techniques used (whispered and consecutive interpretation are found in both settings). However, they do differ in terms of social status, level of income, recognition and training (Hale, 2015). Conference interpreters generally work in close association with professions such as lawyers, doctors, or diplomats; their status above community interpreters is linked to the greater prestige of the users of their services (Inghilleri, 2005).

The international nature of conference interpreting and the existence of a global professional association (AIIC, the Association internationale des interprètes de conférence) has led to a considerable degree of harmonization of training and quality standards across countries (AIIC, 2004). Community interpreting, on the other hand, is deeply tied to the makeup of the local population and the functioning of a country’s public institutions. The close association of community interpreting with migration stems from the implicit assumption that the citizens of a country master its institutional language(s). This idea is rooted in an understanding of language that is closely linked to the modern (European) nation-state. Languages are seen as “distributed over countries”, which in turn present a “stable nation-state institutional language regime” (Blommaert, 2009, p. 420), in which official languages and languages spoken by the population overlap. This might explain why the interpreting studies literature often gives preference to the term *community interpreting* over *public service interpreting*, which is considered simply as its synonym (Pöchhacker, 2015, p. xii), and why the community interpreting profession is described as best established in “countries that have a long history of immigration, such as Australia, Canada and Sweden” and less established in places such as Southern Europe or Japan “that have only recently begun to receive large numbers of migrants and refugees” (Hale, 2015, p. 67). This understanding of community interpreting cannot be transposed directly to the African context.

<sup>4</sup> Sign language interpretation is a type of community interpreting that relies almost exclusively on simultaneous interpretation techniques (Hale, 2015, p. 67); however, the scope of this article is limited to interpretation between spoken languages.

<sup>5</sup> One outcome of this evolution is the creation of the European Masters in Conference Interpreting (EMCI), a consortium of currently 15 universities funded in part by the European Commission and the European Parliament. See <http://www.emcinterpreting.org>.

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## Contextualizing Interpreter Training in Africa

Similarly problematic is the understanding of the interpreter's language combination as comprising an "A" and a "B" language (Delgado Luchner & Loiseau, 2014). In the context of conference interpreting, an "A" language is the interpreter's first language, defined as equivalent to a mother tongue or a language of which one has perfect mastery (AIIC, 2004). This conceptualization is based on the implicit assumption of a situation of "sociolinguistic normalcy" (Blommaert, 2009, p. 425), where the language of the home, the country/region, and the education system are identical. The "B" language is defined as the interpreter's "non-native active language" (Gile, 2005, p. 9), and generally considered to be slightly weaker than the "A" language, although conference interpreters are expected to have full mastery of their B language as well (Déjean Le Féal, 2005; Donovan, 2005). In community interpreting settings, language requirements vary, often following a pattern of supply and demand: Trained interpreters with a high level of mastery in both of their languages might be available for some language combinations but not for others.

### 2. The Kenyan Context

In Kenya, community interpreting practices are widespread but generally not formalized. The country is highly multilingual, with two official languages (English and Swahili) and more than 40 recognized local languages. Kenyans who have some level of formal education are likely to have at least partial mastery of three languages: their mother tongue, Swahili and English. In the Kenyan context, the term *mother tongue* is reserved exclusively for the local language, independent of one's level of mastery (Mbithi, 2014; Michieka, 2012). The mother tongue is often the first by chronological order of acquisition but not necessarily the one in which an individual is most proficient, given that language acquisition in the mother tongue often takes place informally.

As is the case in many other African countries, languages in Kenya are distributed socially, rather than geographically (Blommaert, 2009; Djité, 2008). The mother tongue is used in the family and the wider community, especially in rural areas. Swahili, on the other hand, is "Kenya's lingua franca of wage-employment, trade, and city street" (Lonsdale, 2009, p. 17), the language of "casual inter-ethnic communication" (Ogechi, 2003, p. 279). English remains dominant in Kenya's education system, throughout the public sector and in the formal economy. Kenya's current language constellation is a direct legacy of colonialism and the colonial education system (Djité, 2008; Lonsdale, 2009), and the power relationship between local languages and English is largely asymmetrical.

Although there has been an effort to promote Kenya's different local languages as well as Swahili in recent years, English remains dominant, not least because it is the main medium of instruction in the education system (Mbithi, 2014). A study among Kenyan university students showed that they prefer using English, and, to a lesser extent, Swahili, over their mother tongue (Michieka, 2012). This could in part be because students may find their mastery of their mother tongue, which has not been their language of secondary or postsecondary education, insufficient to discuss a wide range of topics, or that this particular demographic considers English and Swahili more prestigious. Indeed, language use is a matter of mastery but also "loyalty" (Szecsy, 2008), which in turn depends on the economic or social capital derived from using a specific language (Michieka, 2012). Differences in prestige and capital also explain why some mother tongues in Kenya, namely Gikuyu, whose speakers have dominated the politics and economy of Kenya since independence (see for instance Lonsdale, 2009), attract greater loyalty from their speakers than others.<sup>6</sup>

Swahili has gained popularity in Kenya over the past decade, in particular through social media and blogs (Jagero, Mohochi, & Indede, 2013). Politically, Swahili presents two considerable advantages over English: It is not the language of the former colonizer, and it has such a small number of native speakers in Kenya that it is seen as "largely ethnically neutral" (Miguel, 2004, p. 335). A particularity of Kenyan Swahili is the widespread use of

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<sup>6</sup> While a comprehensive discussion of the sociolinguistics of Kenya goes beyond the scope of this paper, a detailed discussion of the language hierarchy between Gikuyu, Swahili and English can be found in wa Thiong'o (1986). The internationally renowned author and political activist started writing mainly in Gikuyu in the 1980s, often self-translating his novels into Swahili and/or English for regional and international distribution, thereby giving Gikuyu a heightened level of visibility.

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## Contextualizing Interpreter Training in Africa

English words or expressions (code-mixing), which stems from the assumption that most individuals are fluent in both languages. Code-mixing and code-switching are commonly used strategies in multilingual communities, because they are flexible adaptations to "disparate and variable sociolinguistic environments" (Langthaler, Witjes, & Slezak, 2012, p. 242).

Kenya's particular brand of multilingualism has several direct implications for interpreting: Both interpreting students and the users of interpreters are likely to present asymmetrical language repertoires (Blommaert, 2009), and the use of Swahili as a vehicular language (Lonsdale, 2009) might limit the need for interpretation in many day-to-day interactions. Nevertheless, many Kenyans, in particular in rural areas, are unable to communicate effectively in English or Swahili and interpreting practices exist in Kenya's hospitals, courts and public institutions. The challenges of court interpreting in particular have been documented in recent years through a number of descriptive case studies (Kiguru, 2009, 2010; Matu, Odhiambo, Adans, & Ongarora 2012; Odhiambo, Kavulani, & Matu, 2013). These studies indicate that most interpreters working in Kenya's courts have not undergone formal interpreter training (Odhiambo et al., 2013) and are not acquainted with relevant codes of ethics (Matu et al., 2012). However, there is a lack of countrywide data about the number of interpreters working for the Kenyan judiciary and the interpreters' languages and training.

In addition to a need for community interpreters, there exists a market for conference interpreting in Kenya and the wider East African region. This market centers around the international organizations based in Nairobi and Addis Ababa, although this market is considerably smaller than those in Brussels, Geneva, Vienna or New York (Delgado Luchner, 2019). The main languages used on this market are English and French.

Both conference and community interpreting thus exist in Kenya, and several initiatives to formalize training and professionalize the sector have sprung up since 2010. In this article, I examine two of these initiatives implemented in two Kenyan universities in partnership with the University of Geneva. The two case studies were carried out from a participant-observer positionality (Galibert, 2004), because I was involved in both courses as a trainer and researcher. The case studies are exploratory, and the contribution of this article resides in drawing on elements from both for the purpose of comparison, in order to obtain insights into interpreting practices in Kenya that transcend the divide between conference and community interpreting. The main question guiding this comparative analysis is how to better contextualize interpreter training in Kenya and, potentially, other African countries.

### 3. Methodology

The two case study summaries are short descriptions based on asymmetrical data sets. Whereas Case Study 1 is a summary based on an in-depth ethnographic study of a conference interpreter training course carried out between 2010 and 2015 (Delgado Luchner, 2019), Case Study 2 draws on my experience as a trainer on a community interpreting course (collected in the form of an ethnographic and pedagogical journal), publicly available information (project descriptions, newspaper articles), and a focus group discussion held with students after the end of the course (seven participants). Detailed analysis of the different dimensions of Case Study 1 can be found in earlier work (Delgado Luchner 2015, 2019), but Case Study 2 has to our knowledge not yet been the object of any publication.

Data were analyzed using the following macro-categories: training context, training objectives, admission requirements, considerations around language selection, in-class language coverage, and work prospects for graduates. These categories were chosen in order to allow for comparability of both case studies with a view to deriving implications for different segments of the interpreting market in Kenya. The case study descriptions contain information on each of these dimensions, which will then be addressed in more depth in the discussion.

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## Contextualizing Interpreter Training in Africa

### 4. Findings

#### 4.1. Case Study 1: Conference Interpreter Training

The University of Nairobi launched its Master's in Conference Interpretation in June 2010. The stated aim of the training course was to prepare students to work as conference interpreters for private and international companies in East Africa and international and regional organizations (in particular the United Nations Office at Nairobi and the African Union).

The course aimed to include the six UN languages, plus Swahili, German and Portuguese. Throughout the pilot phase of the program (2010–2013), a total of 10 interpreters were trained. Of these students, eight were Kenyan nationals, who were training to work either into English (from French and Swahili) or between English and Swahili, while two came from 'francophone Africa' and were training to work between French and English.

In order to be admitted to the course, students had to have a first degree (BA or equivalent) and pass an oral entrance exam that included an assessment of their skills in all languages in their combination. The Master's was structured as a 2-year part-time course, or a "Module II" course in the Kenyan system (Mwiria et al., 2007). Its curriculum was partially based on the existing core curriculum of the European Master's in Conference Interpreting. The practical training component of the interpreting course, 25% of contact hours on the curriculum, was taught mainly by practicing conference interpreters who were not employed by the university: staff interpreters from the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) and the European Commission, or interpreter trainers loaned to the University of Nairobi by the University of Geneva.

Although all the interpreters involved in the practical training component were experienced conference interpreters, none of them was acquainted with the Kenyan or East African interpreting market, and they had little or no knowledge of Swahili, the main language of many of the students enrolled in the course. Recruiting trainers for Swahili was difficult because no formal training course for this language combination had existed before the University of Nairobi course was launched.

In addition to language coverage for Swahili, stakeholders experienced other language-related challenges. The A and B language mastery of some students was considered insufficient by trainers, which led to the belated inclusion of language enhancement courses on the schedule; terminological resources and training materials (namely source speeches for interpretation exercises) in Swahili were scarce; and the relevance of Swahili on the local market proved much more limited than initially expected. A survey carried out among the graduates of the first two intakes (Delgado Luchner, 2015) indicated that all of them had worked as interpreters on at least one occasion, although graduates highlighted a lack of opportunities for the Swahili/English combination.

#### 4.2. Case Study 2: Community Interpreter Training

In the academic year 2014–2015 the University of Geneva and Kenyatta University jointly launched a Certificate in Community Interpreting for refugee students in three locations in Kenya (Dadaab and Kakuma refugee camps and Nairobi). The training course aimed to train community interpreters for the different NGOs and international organizations working with the refugee community in Kenya.

The certificate was language specific, limited to Somali/English interpreters. Somali is the dominant language in Dadaab refugee camp, and an important language amongst refugees in Kakuma and Nairobi. In 2014, when the Kenyatta University course was launched, Somalian nationals accounted for nearly 73% of Kenya's registered refugees and asylum-seekers;<sup>7</sup> today this proportion has declined to around 55%.<sup>8</sup>

A total of 17 students participated in the course, all of them trained to work between Somali and English, although two students also had Swahili in their language combination. Upon request from Kenyatta University,

<sup>7</sup> Source: <http://www.unhcr.org/ke/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/03/KENYA-Statistics-Package-February-2018-1.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Source: [https://www.unhcr.org/ke/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/04/Kenya-Infographics\\_March-2019.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/ke/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/04/Kenya-Infographics_March-2019.pdf).

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## Contextualizing Interpreter Training in Africa

the group of students also included members of the local Kenyan Somali community in Garissa County, where Dadaab refugee camp is located.

In order to be admitted to the course, applicants had to have completed their secondary education (Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education) with a minimum average grade (C-). These admission requirements initially led to the exclusion of all but one of the female applicants. However, because tuition fees were sponsored through scholarships from a donor based in Switzerland, who required a minimum proportion of female students, the requirements were adapted in order to admit three female candidates who had completed their secondary education with a lower average grade, raising the number of course participants to 17 (4 female, 13 male).

The certificate was designed as a 1-year full-time course, with teaching shared between the two universities. Interpreting skills training was conveyed by the University of Geneva, and English language enhancement was provided by Kenyatta University. The curriculum had initially been designed to combine face-to-face and online classes, making use of the Kenyatta University campus in Dadaab opened in 2012.<sup>9</sup> However, after the Kenyan government in early 2014 announced plans to gradually close Dadaab, Kenyatta University had to discontinue face-to-face higher education programs on its Dadaab campus. Therefore, a fully online program emerged as the only viable option.

Neither the Kenyatta University nor the University of Geneva trainers involved in the course spoke Somali, although a Somali speaker based in Europe, who had worked as a community interpreter but never received formal training in this profession, was involved as external consultant to assess student's interpreting performances. In addition to language coverage for Somali, the course presented trainers with several other challenges, linked to the background of the student population or their language combination. The English mastery of some participants was low; terminological resources for Somali and, to a lesser extent Swahili, were scarce; and language variations in Somali led to disagreements among students (refugees from different parts of Somalia, as well as Kenyan Somalis), and between students and the language expert.

Somali/English is a relevant language combination for many NGOs working in Kenya, as well as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. However, we have no data about whether and where the graduates of this joint certificate were able to apply their interpreting skills.

## 5. Discussion

The two training courses described above are two attempts to formalize interpreter training in Kenya. In both cases, adjustments were made to take into account local circumstances. Swahili and Somali were the main languages used, and language enhancement courses were put in place in order to make up for perceived shortcomings in students' mastery of English and, in the case of the University of Nairobi, French. In both cases stakeholders showed a willingness to learn from their experiences. For instance, the inclusion of English language enhancement in the Kenyatta University course resulted from experience at the University of Nairobi, where language enhancement had to be added to the curriculum on the fly. The idea to draw on a language expert for Somali also resulted from experiences from the University of Nairobi course and the understanding that it would be difficult to find a trained interpreter for the Somali/English language combination who would also fulfill the formal requirements to be recruited to teach at a university. These strategies demonstrate stakeholders' ability to think outside the box, and to adapt existing models of interpreter training to the Kenyan context.

Nevertheless, the outcome for graduates from both courses was mixed. My findings indicate that despite a general need for interpreters in Kenya and East Africa, neither training course was able to produce graduates who could satisfy this need directly, because the two training courses aimed to train interpreters *in* the Kenyan context rather than *for* the Kenyan context. Although the case studies are specific to Kenya, many of the findings presented below can apply to other countries in Africa.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2012/oct/15/kenya-kenyatta-university-somali-refugees-dadaab>.

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## Contextualizing Interpreter Training in Africa

In the University of Nairobi case, external trainers and University of Nairobi lecturers had predicted a considerable need for Swahili/English interpreters based on the situation in other countries with several official languages, in particular Canada and Switzerland. However, as mentioned above, Kenyan multilingualism differs considerably from that of Canada or Switzerland. Like many other African countries, Kenya's language-scape is characterized by a "fundamental cleavage that divides members of a society on the basis of their linguistic repertoires" (Langthaler et al., 2012, p. 242). Most Kenyans who have had access to formal education speak English and Swahili. Even those with little formal education, in particular in urban areas, are often able to use Swahili as a vehicular language in day-to-day interactions. Therefore, only Kenyans who have not had access to formal education beyond primary school, and who are living in rural areas where a single language is dominant, are monolingual or unable to communicate in Swahili. For them, interpretation is only useful if it happens from and into their mother tongue. As such, the Swahili/English combination is largely irrelevant for oral interpretation in Kenya. Indeed, Swahili often replaces interpretation: It is shared by a larger and more socially diverse community of speakers than local languages or English, and therefore used widely in interactions between individuals who do not share the same mother tongue or level of education. The particularities of a vehicular language thus emerge as one important element to be taken into account when evaluating the interpreting relevance of language combinations in African countries.

Another assumption that requires closer scrutiny is the strong conceptual link between community interpreting and migration (Hale, 2015), which also permeates the Kenyatta University case study. Although many factors led to the selection of Somali refugees as the primary target group for the certificate, the framing of community interpreting as a practice linked to migrants no doubt facilitated this decision. The insistence of Kenyatta University on including members of the local community in the course indicates that this association was not necessarily accepted by nor natural for the Kenyan university involved in this partnership. Indeed, in Kenya and many other African countries, many citizens do not speak the language of their own public institutions. As such, although many African countries have large migrant communities who might require the services of interpreters, the overwhelming majority of potential community interpreting users are citizens. Therefore, in Africa, community and public service interpreting (PSI) are not necessarily mere "synonyms," as suggested by Pöchhacker (2015). Indeed, PSI (or public service interpreting and translation, PSIT) might be a more suitable term to describe the main stake of dialogue interpreting in Africa: enabling citizens to access their own public institutions. This also means that PSIT in Africa is not linked primarily to the rights of immigrants or refugees, but required so that all citizens of a country may exercise their basic rights to education, health and free expression in a meaningful way. Current conceptualizations of community interpreting are too narrow to make this argument convincingly, because they do not account for this particularity of contemporary African societies and its wide-ranging implications for political participation and democracy.

However, formalizing and professionalizing PSIT requires financial resources that are not readily available in any country. Developing nations in particular, face severe financial constraints, and multilingualism competes with arguably more pressing developmental priorities such as education, health care and security. Training alone is therefore only part of a complex equation in which several important constraints act on the professionalization of conference and community interpreters in Africa. Neither the University of Nairobi nor the Kenyatta University initiative specifically addressed the question of employability. The absence of a market need for Swahili/English interpreters made it difficult for University of Nairobi graduates to earn an income as conference interpreters, whereas the NGOs and refugees who would need Somali/English interpreters might not have the financial resources to pay for their services. As such, the debate on PSIT in Africa must consider economic constraints as well as language rights.

In light of existing constraints, professional translation and interpreting (including PSIT carried out by individuals who are trained and formally employed or self-employed in the formal economy) will most likely remain the tip of the iceberg of multilingual practices in Africa, which include the use of vehicular languages, code-mixing and code-switching (Langthaler et al., 2012), as well as ad hoc translation and interpreting practices between friends or family members (Noah, 2016, p. 159). Indeed, although professionalization might be both possible and desirable for certain subcategories of interpreters (conference interpreters, spoken language court interpreters, sign language court interpreters), informal practices might remain prevalent in other settings. The professionalization of interpreters should therefore be considered as a continuum and transcend the binary

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## Contextualizing Interpreter Training in Africa

distinctions between "professional" and "nonprofessional". Diverse training opportunities should exist both within and outside the formal education system.

In addition, African multilingualism could be better leveraged in interpreter training courses. Hybrid curricula covering PSIT and conference interpreting skills would allow students to use all their languages, including their mother tongue, and acquire the relevant techniques for each of their language pairs (dialogue and consecutive interpreting between the mother tongue and the official language, consecutive and simultaneous interpreting between international languages used at conferences). Such training could follow a modular approach, allowing some candidates to go through only basic modules enabling them to work in a particular context, and others to receive comprehensive professional training applicable across settings and covering all main techniques. A greater polyvalence in terms of skills could also improve graduates' job prospects.

Furthermore, a conceptual dissociation of community interpreting from migration would be beneficial in the African context, because it would allow for better understanding of how public institutions leverage existing linguistic resources. Indeed, unlike European civil servants who rely on interpreters to communicate with foreign nationals, the civil servants working for public institutions in Africa come from the same multilingual space as their interlocutors. As such, many doctors, nurses, court clerks, lawyers and judges have language skills that would allow them to play a pivotal role in enabling access to public institutions. In some cases, however, these public officials hesitate to use nonofficial languages in the workplace, because they are unsure about whether or not they are allowed to do so, and official language policy often provides no clear guidance in this regard. For example, court officials in Burkina Faso and Senegal have very different assumptions about the use of nonofficial languages in the courtroom, although French is the only official language in both countries. Judges and officials in Senegalese courts often resort to using Wolof, the national lingua franca, in order to communicate orally with defendants or witnesses who do not master French; in Burkina Faso court officials exclusively use French and communicate through an interpreter even when they master the language of the defendants or witnesses (Tarr, 2017; Tarr & Sambou, 2017).

In this context, training does not necessarily have to focus only on professionalizing interpreters. Indeed, as argued elsewhere for the South African context (Marais & Delgado Luchner, 2019), one might instead attempt to 'interpretize' officials working in public institutions by making existing language practices more visible and formalizing them. This would give these individuals greater recognition for the language services they are already providing, for instance, oral translation of written documents (Ralarala, 2016; Molefe & Marais, 2013) in courts or police stations to help individuals file a complaint or fill in a form, while ensuring that all languages of the population are taken into consideration. Providing civil servants in highly multilingual countries with basic interpreting skills might also contribute to making institutions more language-sensitive in their service delivery.

## 6. Conclusion

Assumptions about interpreting that have emerged from a Western, in particular European, context, such as the belief that the A language is identical to the mother tongue, and that community interpreting and migration are associated, have to a certain extent shaped the two training initiatives presented above. Actors made some steps towards a contextualization of interpreter training in Africa; however, this contextualization did not fully take into account the Kenyan language situation. Both initiatives therefore failed to make a meaningful contribution to the specific local stakes of language mediation. These stakes are particularly high in Kenya and other African countries, where language has undeniably played a role in many recent conflicts. The discrepancies in access to socioeconomic and political capital between members of Kenya's different language communities have repeatedly sparked tension or even violence in the country. A better representation of different languages in the country's public institutions, through language-sensitive civil servants and skilled public service interpreters, might make an important positive contribution to social cohesion and political participation.

Institutions and individuals in Africa are already drawing on a wide range of multilingual communication practices. Public officials in different African countries use their mother tongue or a vehicular language to communicate with citizens in courts (Tarr & Sambou, 2017) and police stations (Molefe & Marais, 2013). In light of these practices, interpreting studies must broaden its conceptual scope to better understand how language

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## Contextualizing Interpreter Training in Africa

barriers are transcended, both with and without the help of language mediators. As long as these practices remain informal and hidden from view, however, the mastery of a local language will not be tested or taken into account in the recruitment of civil servants. This means that language coverage in public services is left to chance, and that citizens of different language groups will not enjoy equal treatment. A better representation of different languages in public institutions, through language-sensitive civil servants and skilled public service interpreters, might make an important positive contribution to social cohesion and political participation.

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