

Public Service Interpreting and Social Contracts: paradoxes and challenges in language service provision

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Changes to the organization of interpreter provisions in the justice system in England and Wales and their perceived failure have raised questions about the nature of contracts in public service interpreting, and the social and political contexts in which they emerge.

My talk focuses on the range of contracts between states and populations of limited language proficient speakers at macro, meso and micro levels in order to unpack the ideological and practical issues that can impact on their development and implementation.

Drawing on theories of social contractarianism, which have served to examine the relationship between established professions such as medicine and healthcare, the state and the general public, I explore the evolution of the interpreting profession and examine the wider issues of social justice arising from the exclusion of certain groups from the point at which the principles of justice are designed (following Nussbaum 2007).

Finally, I consider the problem of the contractual relation at organizational level between service users and interpreters. Referring to a recent case study in which assumptions about the relative stability of the contractual relation within a single assignment and across a series of assignments involving the same service user are challenged to some extent, I suggest scope for considering both a needs-led and outcomes-led approach to interpreter-mediated service delivery.

Reference

Nussbaum, Martha. 2007. *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*. Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap Press.