

Research Assessment Exercise 2020
Impact Case Study

University: Hong Kong Baptist University
Unit of Assessment (UoA): 32 Translation

Title of case study: Improving the medical interpreting services in Hong Kong

(1) Summary of the impact

Ethnic minorities who do not speak a dominant local language have difficulty in accessing healthcare services without the aid of interpreters. Ester Leung's research was conducted to professionalize medical interpreters and supply evidence to advocate for policy changes regarding the provision of interpreting services. She developed a model for medical interpreter training involving participants of diverse linguistic backgrounds, and established a professional body to enhance interpreting services. Interpreters qualified through this project have enjoyed career advancement and greater earning power. They have interpreted in public hospitals on circa 10,000 occasions annually, facilitating provision of quality healthcare services and saving lives.

(2) Underpinning research

In accordance with the 2008 Racial Discrimination Act, provision of interpreting services is required to ensure equal access to public services for ethnic minorities who do not speak the dominant languages (English and Chinese) in Hong Kong [3.1]. Leung's Public Policy Research project entitled "Community Interpreting in Hong Kong" was supported by the University Grants Committee in 2010 [3.6]. The aim of her work was to study the language rights of ethnic minorities and their access to public services in Hong Kong. Based on the findings of her Community Interpreting project [3.6] and her work on legal interpreting and forensic linguistics [3.5], she extended her study to focus on interpreting in healthcare services in her 2011 Knowledge Transfer project, "Improving the Medical Interpreting Services in Hong Kong" [3.6]. She discovered that interpreting services were provided mainly on an ad hoc basis, and that most interpreters had received no training to interpret in medical settings [3.2]. The interpreters sometimes explained and highlighted information which they considered important but missed patients' original meanings [3.4]. Such non-professional interpreting impacted the standard of the medical consultations and doctors' diagnoses, hence seriously impeding the quality of the healthcare services that the ethnic minority communities received [3.4].

To address the issues identified from her research, Leung designed and delivered the first medical interpreting training course in Hong Kong, which included interpreting skills, contextual knowledge of medical settings, and the recent research results of medical science on empathetic communication [3.4] [3.7]. She subsequently developed and delivered related courses from 2010 to 2017, in partnership with Translingual Services (TS), a social enterprise of the Lady MacLehose Centre (LMC). TS was crucial to the research as the sole referral agent of the Public Hospital Authority (PHA) for medical interpreting services.

Leung applied a participatory action research framework, simultaneously updating and delivering training courses whilst also exploring how to empower the different stakeholders to become 'agents for change'. This approach involved the stakeholders as partners in the research design and process, rather than as objects of study, as a means to help them recognize the significance of training and the importance of appropriate remuneration, thus ensuring that interpreters would have sufficient motivation to undergo professional training. With the diverse linguistic backgrounds of the ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, as a way to sustain the impact of her research Leung also organized a

training of trainers course for experienced interpreters working in medical and legal settings. Leung is also amongst the few scholars to use authentic data from her research projects and to apply a discourse analysis-based approach in the training. In this way, she has been able to better equip the trainers with the material and methods to transfer their experience and knowledge to subsequent trainees in a systematic manner [3.6] [3.7]. An equal partnership with the different stakeholders in this project has allowed the generation of knowledge and experience that are relevant to and prioritized by all concerned.

(3) References to the research

Publications

1. Leung, Ester S. M. (2003). Rights to be heard and the rights to be interpreted. *Babel*, 49(4), 289-301.
2. Leung, Ester S. M. (2008). Interpreting for the minority, interpreting for the power. In J. Gibbons & M. T. Turell (Eds.), *Dimensions of forensic linguistics* (pp. 197-211). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
3. Leung, Ester S. M. (2013). A converted interpreting trainer's response. In E. A. Winston & C. Monikowski (Eds.), *Evolving paradigms in interpreter education* (pp. 82-86). Washington, D. C.: Gallaudet University Press.
4. Leung, Ester, S. M. (forthcoming 2019). Medical interpreting as an emerging profession in Hong Kong. In I. Crezee & E. Ng (Eds.), *Recent advances in legal and healthcare interpreting: International perspective*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
5. 梁倩雯《法庭的語言鑑證》，香港：商務印書館，2017。(Leung, Ester, S.M. (2017) *Forensic linguistics in courts*, Hong Kong: Commercial Press.)

Research grants

6. Leung, Ester S. M. (2010). Community Interpreting in Hong Kong. *Public Research Grant*, University Grants Committee, Hong Kong.
7. Leung, Ester S. M. (2011). Improving the Medical Interpreting Services in Hong Kong, *Knowledge Transfer Fund*, Hong Kong Baptist University.

(4) Details of the impact

4.1) Changing of policy regarding the use of professionally trained interpreters

Provision of interpreting services by professionally trained medical interpreters is now stipulated by the Hospital Authority [5.11]. Since spearheading the first medical interpreting training course in 2010, Leung had been involved in the training of the medical interpreter-trainees of Translingual Service (TS) of the Lady MacLehose Centre (LMC). By 2017, over 100 interpreters with 17 language backgrounds had been trained and qualified by Leung. In 2016, TS provided interpreting services to over 10,000 cases [5.2][5.3]. Over the same period, Leung also collaborated with LMC to monitor their interpreting services at public hospitals [5.6][5.7].

4.2) Empowering the stakeholders to become the 'agents for change'

Together with the service users and interpreters, Leung founded the Multilingual Interpreters' & Translators' Association (MITA) in 2012 [5.1] which aims to: 1) promote and advocate professional and ethical interpreting services and 2) develop measures and training courses to enhance the professionalism and social recognition of ethnic minority interpreters. Experienced members of MITA were trained as trainers, and were subsequently involved in the medical interpreters' training, and mentoring of novice medical and legal interpreters. MITA also hosts the only register of professional ethnic minority interpreters for public access in Hong Kong.

Graduates of the courses acknowledged Leung's contribution to their professional development. Some are now working as interpreters in the Judiciary and the Immigration Office [5.4]. Two members of MITA, one Nepalese and one Mainland Chinese, had completed their doctoral studies on legal and medical interpreting under Leung's supervision. The former secretary of MITA, a medical practitioner, founded the social enterprise Health Connection (HC) in 2016 to sustain the work of MITA. HC provides medical translation and interpretation services, and delivers training to organizations and institutions working with or serving ethnic minorities [5.5].

4.3 Partnering with the commissioning agency and other institutions

Training that Leung provided to TS has relieved their workload, so that they can focus on expanding and improving their referral services for the HA [5.2], and it won the "Merit Award (Social Enterprise Category)" at the Hong Kong Outstanding Corporate Citizenship Awards organized by Hong Kong Productivity Council in 2015, the "Good SO Outstanding Social Enterprise" Award by InnoBrand JCI Victoria in 2016, and the "Outstanding Social Impact Award" of the Social Enterprise Award Scheme 2017 co-organized by the Home Affairs Bureau. Teaching kits that she has developed for medical interpreter training have been adopted by TS in the training that Polytechnic University now has taken over. As representative of the Hong Kong Chapter of the International Medical Interpreters Association (IMIA), she has nominated TS as a member service provider, to ensure that it is informed of the latest developments in medical interpreting at an international level.

4.4 Expanding the economic capital of the interpreters and saving public service costs

According to the 2015 (midterm) Census, a large number of working-age males from the ethnic minorities were engaged in manual labour. Training provided by Leung has provided an alternative for those who have received higher education to capitalize on their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, which has increased competitiveness and created upward mobility opportunities for members of the ethnic minorities [5.8]. One MITA member, for instance, is now making HK\$35,000 per month compared to HK\$7,500 at his former job as a security guard.

Providing quality interpreting services to users and providers of the public services has helped reduce the risk of misdiagnosis in medical encounters. As established by other research studies, "patients are less likely to get appointments for medical follow-up" (Sarver & Baker 2000), and are more likely to comply with the prescriptions of the doctors (Institute of Medicine 2001). Better communication processes with the assistance of interpreters therefore facilitate better health care services. Similar observations have been made based on the users' responses in the service survey conducted by LMC.

4.5 Raising public awareness and encouraging ethnic minority integration

Leung's work has raised public awareness of the needs and rights of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong, as evidenced by the volume of media coverage and regular workshops that she has been invited to conduct for the language officers of the Government of HKSAR [5.9]. To recognise the positive impact of her research in improving community interpretation services for ethnic minorities, she was granted the prestigious Outstanding Mentor of Social Enterprise Award in November 2013 by the Hong Kong Home Affairs Department [5.10], and awarded a place on the International Visiting Leadership Program of the US Embassy in February 2017, during which she shared her experience with policy makers and service providers from different parts of the world on issues related to marginalized populations' access to healthcare.

(5) Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Hong Kong Commercial Daily (香港商報) (2012年10月1日), A06, 「助解決求助溝通問題 MITA 培訓少數族裔翻譯人才」(To solve the communication problem, MITA trains ethnic minorities to be professional interpreters, October 1, 2012).
2. Testimonial letter from a Professional Supervisor (2014-2017), Services for Ethnic Minorities Unit of Hong Kong Shing Kung Hui, Lady MacLehose Centre (HKSKHLMC).
3. Cooperative agreement with HKSKHLMC for training interpreters.
4. Testimonial letters from MITA members.
5. Testimonial letter from the Director of Health Connection (HC).
6. Two replies by the Secretary for Food and Health to Legislative Council Questions:
 - a) (LCQ 21: Interpretation services of Hospital Authority) in October 2014;
 - b) (LCQ 21: Provision of interpretation services by Hospital Authority) in February 2016.
7. Cooperative agreement with HKSKHLMC for monitoring the quality of hospital interpreters.
8. Articles from the HKSKHLMC, a NGO in Hong Kong: *“Dr Leung has provided professional training in translation to the ethnic minorities and developed the foundation for the development of the translation programme. Moreover, the translation programme developed by Dr Leung helped the ethnic minorities in increasing their competitiveness in the society and created upward mobility opportunities for them.”*
9. *“Dr Leung has been working with us since 2011. She has worked with us to develop some groundbreaking services, like the training of the interpreting services for our interpreters, which is actually the first and only training service available in Hong Kong. Dr Leung has been an important partner of ours in promoting other racial awareness activities to raise the awareness of the dominant society to the needs of the ethnic minorities as well.”*
(Letter from the former Professional Supervisor of HKSKHLMC).
10. Announcement of Results of “Friends of Social Enterprise Award Scheme 2013” from the Hong Kong Government press releases.
<http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/201311/04/P201311010310.htm>
11. Two photographs of the Hospital Authority’s notices on interpreting services, one taken before 2010, another in 2019.