RESEARCH ARTICLE

Characterising the Practice of Community Interpreting in Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

This study has as objective to characterize the practice of community interpreting in Cameroon. The following methods were used to collect the necessary data for the study: Documentary and archival sources; questionnaires administered to relevant stakeholders in the medical, legal, escort and religious fields; structured interviews of certain categories of stakeholders who can neither read nor write fluently; participant observation, the researcher being himself a practicing legal interpreter and community interpreting instructor, and focus group discussion. The data thus collected through all these methods enabled the effective and clear characterization of the practice of community interpreting in the country. However, due to space constraints, and as a first step of the characterization, this article dwells on the various variables, parameters and indicators that correlate with the various subtypes of community interpreting.

In this article, an attempt is first of all made to highlight the correlation between the sub-type of community interpreting and the various variables, parameters and indicators under study. Focus is on the main types of community interpreting that data had revealed were practised, having identified the main actors involved. These main sub-types are court, medical, religious and escort interpreting. Such correlations enabled a characterization and profiling of the various types of community interpreting as well as their practitioners, thus stating clearly how each sub-type of community interpreting is practised, what are the dos and don'ts. Such endeavour also made it possible to establish crosscutting features in the various community interpreting sub-types. Thanks to this analysis, the most practised sub-types of community interpreting and their characteristics were established. This was all the more important as a comprehensive image of the practice of community interpreting could not be achieved without looking at the various sub-types. Some of the variables, parameters and indicators relating to the various subtypes are briefly discussed in turn below.

1. Registration

A good proportion, (82.4%) of court interpreters were not registered as professional interpreters, 74 % of medical interpreters were also not registered and 93% of religious interpreters were not registered just like the majority, 85.5%, of escort interpreters.

Table 1. Association between type of community interpreting and formal registration as professional interpreter

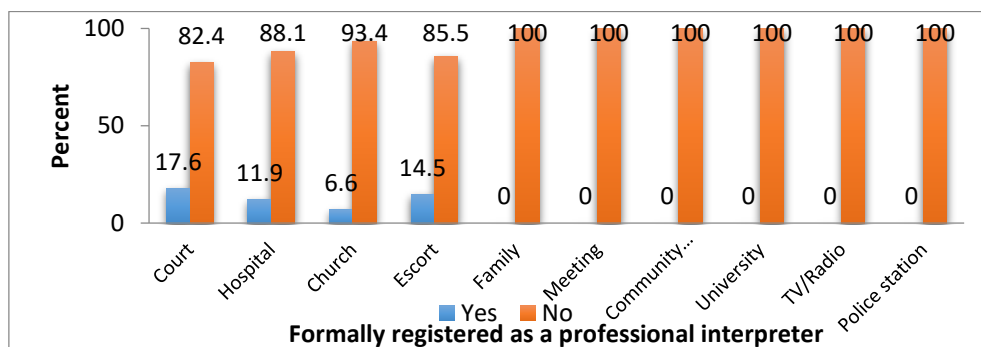| Place	Stats	Are you formally registered as a professional interpreter?		Total
		Yes	No	
Court	n	9	42	51
	%	17.6%	82.4%	
Hospital	n	10	74	84
	%	11.9%	88.1%	
Church	n	4	57	61
	%	6.6%	93.4%	
Escort	n	10	59	69
	%	14.5%	85.5%	
Family	n	0	19	19
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
Meeting	n	0	2	2
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
Community celebration	n	0	1	1
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
University	n	0	1	1
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
TV/Radio	n	0	1	1
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
Police station	n	0	3	3
	%	0.0%	100.0%	

Fig.1. Distribution of community interpreters by formally registered as a professional interpreter

2. Swearing-in

Only 35.3% of court interpreters had sworn in as professionals, barely 14.3% of medical interpreters were sworn interpreters and only 8.2% of religious interpreters were sworn interpreters. 18.8% of escort interpreters were sworn interpreters. Very few community interpreters are sworn interpreters

Table 2. Correlation between types of community interpreters and being sworn in

Place	Stats	Are you a sworn interpreter?		Total
		Yes	No	
Court	n	18	33	51
	%	35.3%	64.7%	
Hospital	n	12	72	84
	%	14.3%	85.7%	

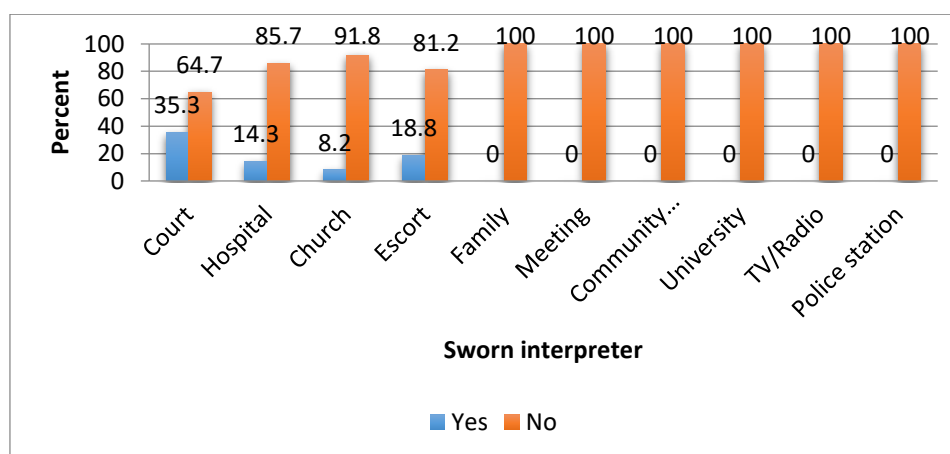|				
Church	n	5	56	61
	%	8.2%	91.8%	
Escort	n	13	56	69
	%	18.8%	81.2%	
Family	n	0	19	19
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
Meeting	n	0	2	2
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
Community celebration	n	0	1	1
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
University	n	0	1	1
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
TV/Radio	n	0	1	1
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
Police station	n	0	3	3
	%	0.0%	100.0%	

Fig.2. Distribution of community interpreters by swearing in

3. Hearing

Very few community interpreters had hearing problems only 7.8% of court interpreters, 1.2% of medical interpreters, 3.3% of religious interpreters, only 1.5% of escort interpreters, 10.5% of those who interpreted for their families had hearing impediments and none in the rest of the groups of respondents had any hearing impediments.

Table 3. Correlation between type of community interpreting and hearing problem

Place	Stats	Do you have hearing problems?		Total
		Yes	No	
Court	n	4	47	51
	%	7.8%	92.2%	
Hospital	n	1	82	83
	%	1.2%	98.8%	
Church	n	2	59	61
	%	3.3%	96.7%	
Escort	n	1	67	68

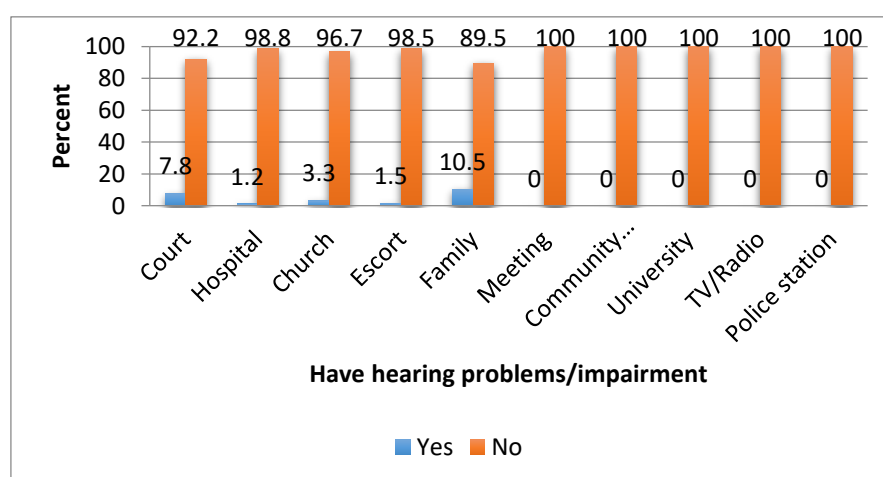|				
	%	1.5%	98.5%	
Family	n	2	17	19
	%	10.5%	89.5%	
Meeting	n	0	2	2
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
Community celebration	n	0	1	1
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
University	n	0	1	1
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
TV/Radio	n	0	1	1
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
Police station	n	0	3	3
	%	0.0%	100.0%	

Fig.3. Distribution of community interpreters with respect to having hearing problems/impairment

4. Retentive Memory

Most community interpreters had good retentive memories. 94.1% of court interpreters, 97.6% of medical interpreters had good retentive memories, up to 98% of religious interpreters, 95.7% of escort interpreters, 94% of those who interpreted for their families had good retentive memories and all those in the remaining groups sampled had good retentive memories.

Table 4: Correlation between type of community interpreter and having good retentive memory

Place	Stats	Do you have a good retentive memory?		Total
		Yes	No	
Court	n	48	3	51
	%	94.1%	5.9%	
Hospital	n	82	2	84
	%	97.6%	2.4%	
Church	n	60	1	61
	%	98.4%	1.6%	
Escort	n	66	3	69
	%	95.7%	4.3%	
Family	n	18	1	19
	%	94.7%	5.3%	

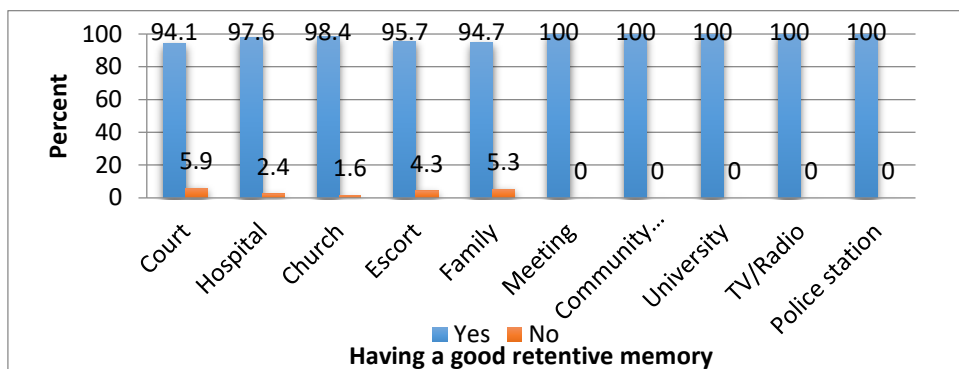|				
Meeting	n	2	0	2
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
Community celebration	n	1	0	1
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
University	n	1	0	1
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
TV/Radio	n	1	0	1
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
Police station	n	3	0	3
	%	100.0%	0.0%	

Fig.4 Distribution of community interpreters by having good retentive memory

5. Public Speaking

All community interpreters found it easy to speak in public as all respondents (100%) in various groups concurred to the fact but for court interpreters and those who interpreted during community events 2% and 100% respectively claimed they could not speak with ease in public.

Table 5. Correlation between type of community interpreting and public speaking

Place	Stats	Do you find it easy to speak in public?		Total
		Yes	No	
Court	n	50	1	51
	%	98.0%	2.0%	
Hospital	n	84	0	84
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
Church	n	61	0	61
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
Escort	n	65	4	69
	%	94.2%	5.8%	
Family	n	19	0	19
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
Meeting	n	2	0	2
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
Community celebration	n	0	1	1
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
University	n	1	0	1
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
TV/Radio	n	1	0	1

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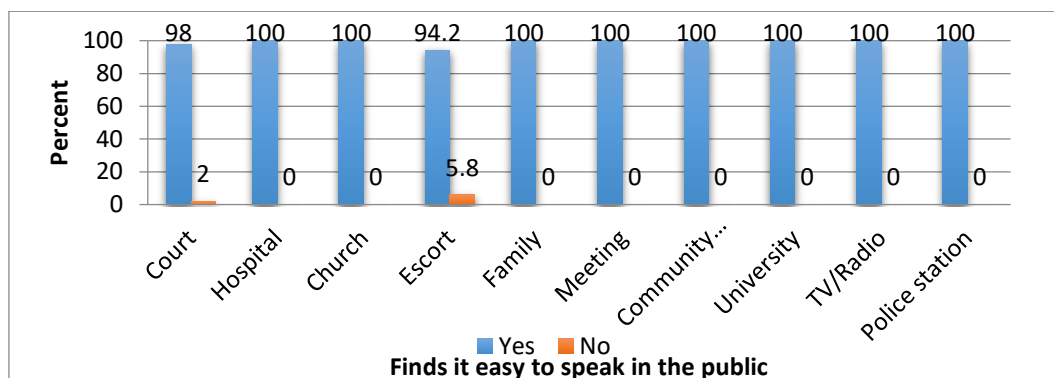|				
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
Police station	n	3	0	3
	%	100.0%	0.0%	

Fig.5. Distribution of community interpreters by speaking at ease in public

6. Accommodation

A great majority of community interpreters had good interpersonal relationship skills. Only 9.8% of court interpreters could not easily accommodate others, 3.5% of medical interpreters could not do same, 3.3% of religious interpreters could not easily accommodate others and only 1.4% of escort interpreters could not easily accommodate others.

Table 6: correlation between type of community interpreting and interpersonal relationship skills

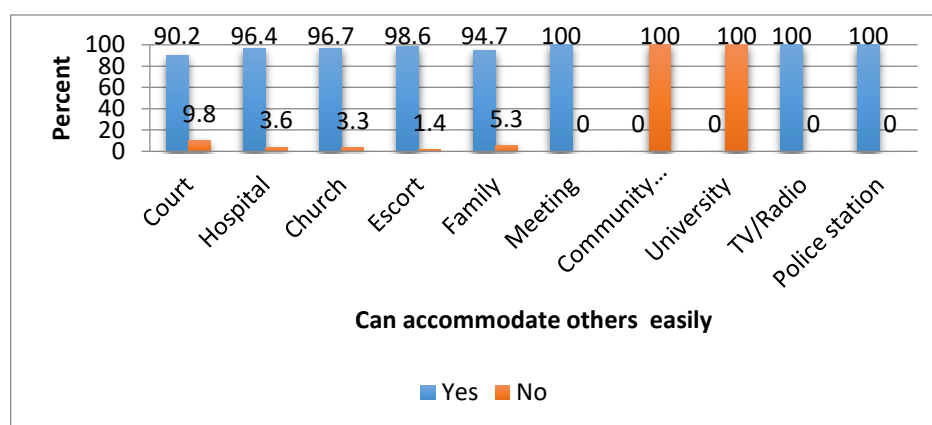| Place	Stats	Do you accommodate others easily?		Total
		Yes	No	
Court	n	46	5	51
	%	90.2%	9.8%	
Hospital	n	81	3	84
	%	96.4%	3.6%	
Church	n	59	2	61
	%	96.7%	3.3%	
Escort	n	68	1	69
	%	98.6%	1.4%	
Family	n	18	1	19
	%	94.7%	5.3%	
Meeting	n	2	0	2
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
Community celebration	n	0	1	1
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
University	n	0	1	1
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
TV/Radio	n	1	0	1
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
Police station	n	3	0	3
	%	100.0%	0.0%	

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Fig.6. Distribution of community interpreters by their ability to easily accommodate others

7. The Code of Ethics

Very few interpreters were aware of the existence of a code of ethics. Out of 51 court interpreters, only 17 (33.3%) were aware of the existence of a code of ethics in community interpreting. Out of 84 medical interpreters, only 12 (14.3%) were aware of a code of ethics. Out of 61 religious interpreters, only 6 (9.8%) were aware of any code of ethics in community interpreting. Out of 69 escort interpreters, only 13 (18.8%) were aware of the existence of any code of ethics in community interpreting. For the rest of the groups, almost no one had an idea on the existence of a code of ethics. All these details are presented in table 46 below.

Table 7. Correlation between community interpreting and awareness of the code of ethics in community interpreting

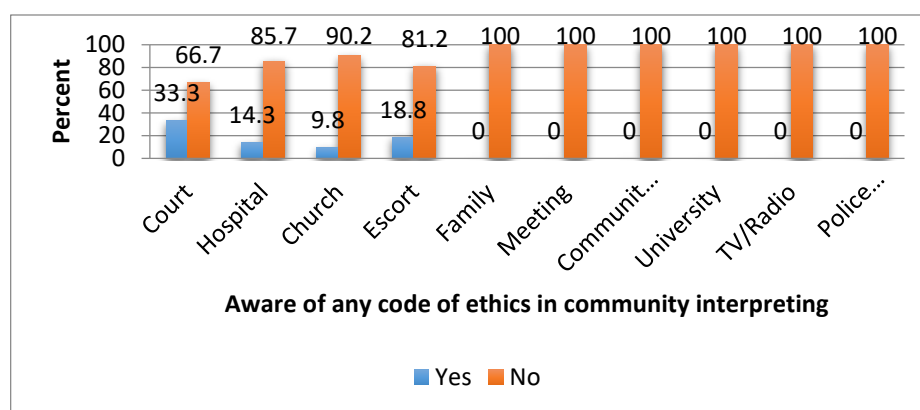| Place	Stats	Are you aware of any code of ethics in community interpreting?		Total
		Yes	No	
Court	n	17	34	51
	%	33.3%	66.7%	
Hospital	n	12	72	84
	%	14.3%	85.7%	
Church	n	6	55	61
	%	9.8%	90.2%	
Escort	n	13	56	69
	%	18.8%	81.2%	
Family	n	0	19	19
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
Meeting	n	0	2	2
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
Community celebration	n	1	0	1
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
University	n	0	1	1
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
TV/Radio	n	0	1	1
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
Police station	n	0	3	3
	%	0.0%	100.0%	

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Fig.7. Distribution of community interpreters by awareness of any code of ethics in community interpreting

8. Adherence to the Code of Ethics

Data collected here presents how often interpreters respect the code of ethics.

Table 8: Correlation between type of community interpreter and adherence to code of ethics

Place	Stats	How often do you adhere to such code of ethics?			Total
		Always	Sometimes	Scarcely	
Court	n	13	1	3	17
	%	76.5%	5.9%	17.6%	
Hospital	n	12	0	0	12
	%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
Church	n	4	0	2	6
	%	66.7%	0.0%	33.3%	
Escort	n	13	0	0	13
	%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
Community celebration	n	1	0	0	1
	%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	

Of the 17 court interpreters who were aware of a code of ethics in community interpreting, 13(76.5%) adhered to it, 1(5.9%) sometimes adhered to it, and 3(17.6%) scarcely adhered to it. All 12 medical interpreters who knew about the existence of a code of ethics adhered to it. 4 out of the 6 religious interpreters who were aware of the existence of a code of ethics in community interpreting adhered to it while 2(33.3%) scarcely adhered to this code of community interpreting. All the 13 escort interpreters who were aware of a code of ethics in community interpreting adhered to it.
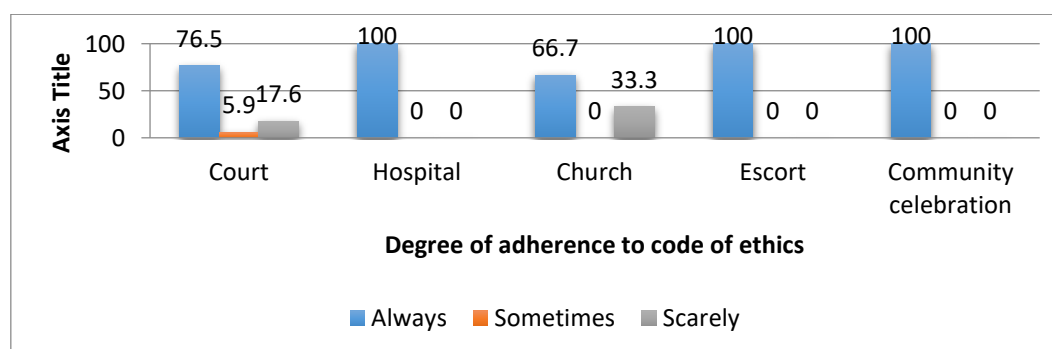

Fig.8. Distribution of community interpreters by degree of adherence to code of ethics

8.1. Impartiality

Interpreters are expected to remain neutral in the exercise of their duties. To avoid bias, they are not allowed to explain, except expressly authorized, they are expected to speak in the first person, that is, use direct speech to convey messages.

a) Explaining what a Speaker Says

Out of 51 court interpreters who responded to the questionnaire, 34 (66.7%) speak in direct speech and 17(33.3%) do not. Out of the 84 medical interpreters, 59 (70.2%) explain what they hear during doctor-patient encounters while 25(29.8%) do not. Almost all religious interpreters 52 (85.2%), explain what the speaker says in church while only 9 (14.8%) do not. Out of the 69 escort interpreters who responded to the questionnaire, 53(76.8%) explain what the speaker says while 16 (23.2%) do not. Almost all those who fall in the other groups of community interpreting explain what the speaker says.

Table 9. Correlation between community interpreter and explaining what a speaker says

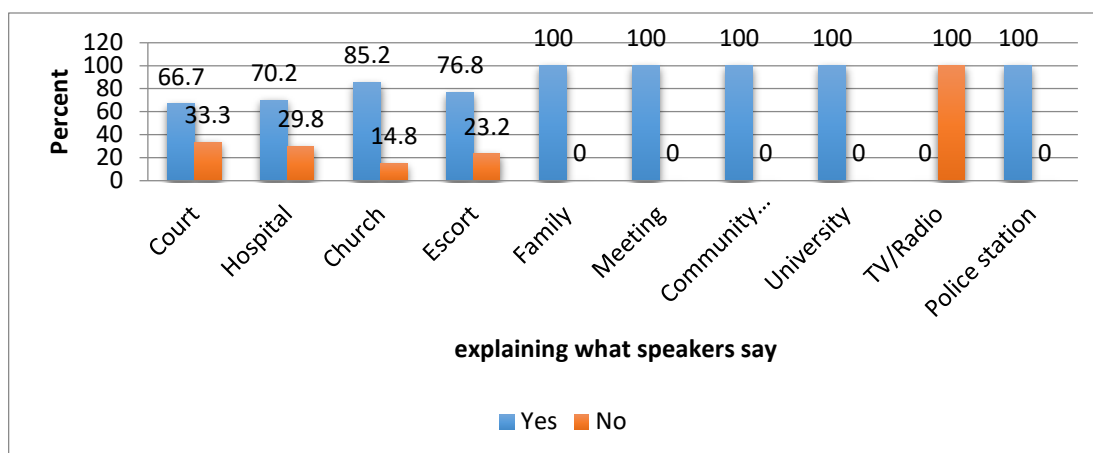| Place	Stats	Do you explain what a speaker says?		Total
		Yes	No	
Court	n	34	17	51
	%	66.7%	33.3%	
Hospital	n	59	25	84
	%	70.2%	29.8%	
Church	n	52	9	61
	%	85.2%	14.8%	
Escort	n	53	16	69
	%	76.8%	23.2%	
Family	n	19	0	19
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
Meeting	n	2	0	2
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
Community celebration	n	1	0	1
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
University	n	1	0	1
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
TV/Radio	n	0	1	1
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
Police station	n	3	0	3
	%	100.0%	0.0%	

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Fig. 9. Distribution of community interpreters by the act of explaining what speakers say

b) Speaking in the First Person

Only 22 (43.1%) court interpreters speak as if they were the owners of the speech while interpreting while up to 29 (56.9%) do not. Only 34 (40.5%) medical interpreters speak in the first person while interpreting and a good majority, 50 (59.5%), do not speak in the first person while interpreting during doctor-patient encounters. Only 28 (45.9%) religious interpreters speak in the first person while interpreting and up to 33 (54.1%) do not speak in the first person. Only 24 (34.8%) escort interpreters speak in the first person while up to 45 (65.2%) do not.

Table 10 Correlation between community interpreter and speaking as if one was the owner of the speech i.e. in the first person

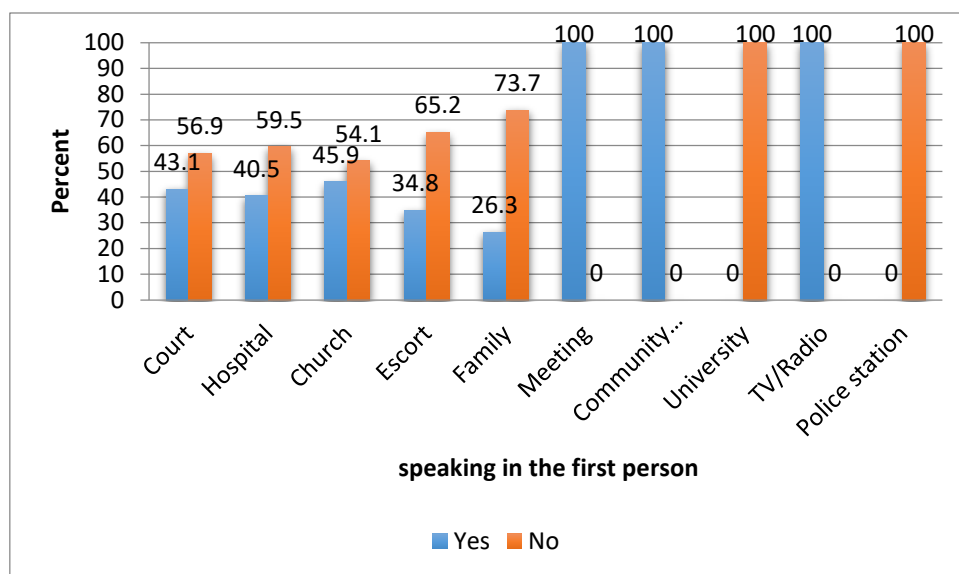| Place	Stats	Do you speak as if you were the owner of the speech?		Total
		Yes	No	
Court	n	22	29	51
	%	43.1%	56.9%	
Hospital	n	34	50	84
	%	40.5%	59.5%	
Church	n	28	33	61
	%	45.9%	54.1%	
Escort	n	24	45	69
	%	34.8%	65.2%	
Family	n	5	14	19
	%	26.3%	73.7%	
Meeting	n	2	0	2
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
Community celebration	n	1	0	1
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
University	n	0	1	1
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
TV/Radio	n	1	0	1
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
Police station	n	0	3	3
	%	0.0%	100.0%	

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Fig.10. Distribution of community interpreters by speaking in the first person

8.2. Faithfulness/ Fidelity

Fidelity here is construed as the act of conveying only what is said in an encounter. This, to many professional interpreters, is different from faithfulness which is the act of saying exactly what was said in an encounter. In a conversation, usually there is a tendency of going beyond what is said to ease understanding.

Most court interpreters, 35 (68.6%), deem it necessary to convey all that is said in an encounter while some 16 (31%) still believe not all that is said in an encounter should be conveyed. Only 47 (56.6%) of medical interpreters deem it necessary to convey all that is said in an encounter while a good proportion, 37 (44%), still feel not everything should be conveyed. Only 34 (55.7%) of religious interpreters deem it necessary to convey all that is said in an encounter while almost the same number 27 (44.3%), feel it is not necessary to convey all that is said in an encounter. 41 (59.4%) of escort interpreters do convey all that is said in an encounter, while 28 (40.6%) deem it unnecessary to convey all that is said during an encounter.

Table 11: Association between community interpreter and conveying all what is said in an encounter

Place	Stats	Do you deem it necessary to convey all what is said in an encounter?		Total
		Yes	No	
Court	n	35	16	51
	%	68.6%	31.4%	
Hospital	n	47	37	84
	%	56.0%	44.0%	
Church	n	34	27	61
	%	55.7%	44.3%	
Escort	n	41	28	69
	%	59.4%	40.6%	
Family	n	9	10	19
	%	47.4%	52.6%	
Meeting	n	1	1	2
	%	50.0%	50.0%	
Community celebration	n	1	0	1
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
University	n	1	0	1

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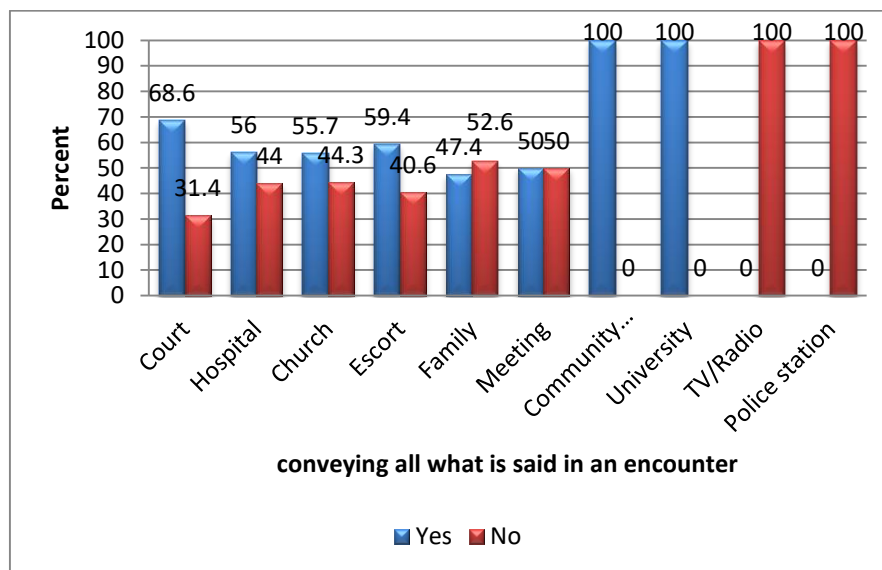|				
	%	100.0%	0.0%	
TV/Radio	n	0	1	1
	%	0.0%	100.0%	
Police station	n	0	3	3
	%	0.0%	100.0%	

Fig.11. Distribution of community interpreters by conveyance of all what is said in an encounter

a) Conveying Culture Bound Terms

Community interpreters are also known as cultural mediators or cultural brokers. However, it might still be necessary to know whether they see things the same way. 32 (62.7%) court interpreters convey cultural bound terms while a good number of them 19 (37.3%), still do not convey culture bound terms. Only 39 (46.4%) of medical interpreters in Cameroon do convey cultural bound terms while the majority 45 (53.6%) do not. An even proportion 31 (50.8%) of religious interpreters convey cultural bound terms and 30 (49.2%) do not. Almost same goes for escort interpreters where 38 (55.1%) convey culture bound terms while 31 (44.9%) do not.

Completeness or fullness of message is strictly envisaged in any interpretation situation. Community interpreters must endeavour to convey all that is said in an encounter.

An average number of court interpreters convey cultural nuances, 56.9% convey cultural nuances while the rest, 43.1 %, do not. Only 47.6 % of medical interpreters convey cultural nuances while up to 52.4% do not. 35 (57.4%) religious interpreters do convey cultural nuances while the rest 42.6% do not. 38 (55.1%) escort interpreters convey cultural nuances while 31 (44.9%) do not.

To conclude, it is evident from the data displayed in the tables and figures above that there is a clear picture of the variables, parameters and indicators of some of some of the various sub-types of community interpreting and how it is practiced in Cameroon.

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