

Title of PhD thesis: ‘Interpreting Taboo: Developing and Evaluating Strategies in the Transfer of Taboo Language’

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Summary of the research project:

Taboo is anything which is said or done that is seen as offensive or embarrassing. Equally it is an agreement amongst people to NOT say or do something as it may be seen as embarrassing or offensive! To interpret taboo is hard within the same language community as the definition of taboo differs according to many factors such as gender, age, social class, era and context, but it is even harder to interpret between two language communities especially if the two belong to cultures that are vastly different. However, omitting taboo can lead to severe consequences that may have legal implications or may even be fatal; hence it can no longer be ignored. This creates a dilemma for interpreter practitioners, students, teachers of languages and of translation & interpreting as many prefer to bypass this awkwardness as if it was never uttered or has never existed. The research will delve into the reasons behind the use of taboo in society and the rules that govern this usage; it will explore the reasons behind the difficulties facing interpreters when translating into their mother tongue as opposed to the other direction; it will also touch on how the existence of taboo has affected language teaching in some countries and how it has also affected language use itself, for example in the abandonment of some homonyms, the association with the three types of euphemisms and cross- varietal synonyms. In order to ensure clarity, the different types of taboo will be defined with examples from the onset.

The aim of the research is to come up with guidelines that could be used in the training of both public service interpreters and conference interpreters. The research question is two-fold: is it important to interpret taboo? And if so, what are the guidelines for interpreting such utterances or for training to interpret such utterances? The impact of such guidelines should make a large change for the practice of interpreting. A closer inspection of Grice’s maxims of communication plus other scholars’ work in the field of communication and what facilitates effective communication will help in the drafting of the guidelines. This will include the notion

of face such as the difference between losing face or saving face or maybe managing to maintain face in addition to politeness and turn-taking in communication.

The major methodological areas that will be used to support the analysis are as follows:

- Pragmatics
- Dynamic equivalence as discussed by Nida, Newmark, Bassnett-McGuire because this theory looks at the *effect* or *impact* of texts on the audience as well as the transference of the *spirit* of the text, which is very relevant in this context.
- Domestication as explained by Venuti and Toury.
- Euphemisms which are divided into three types: Dysphemism, which is speaking offensively, as is seen when someone talks about someone they hate where they will mostly use cursing; orthophemism which is straight talking used mostly in formal speech and euphemism which is sweet talking found mostly in every day speech where it is used to avoid using bad words in that they skirt around the issue hence avoid embarrassment to the speaker.

This method will be pioneering as it will be the first of its kind; the outcome is hoped to have an impact on interpreters and how to conduct themselves in awkward situations. Applied research on taboo has not been undertaken like this before, making it unique in the field. Paying attention to, and applying the results will not only lead to a more accurate, more faithful and efficient interpreting, but once the interpreters understand why people swear and use bad language it will help them realise when a situation is threatening to get out of hand, for example in mental health assignments where the gradual increase in bad language may indicate a negative change in the patient's mental status that may lead to disruptions and maybe even violence. Avoiding this is easily achieved once the interpreter is aware of the reasons for such bad language. With lack of awareness, the interpreter may assume the bad language is due to bravado only, so he may ignore it altogether which may create a bad situation for him.