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**Master's Thesis (MA)**

## **Deconstructing “common sense”**

Normative ethics and decision-making

by sign language interpreters

*Lourdes Calle-Alberdi*

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Humak University of Applied Sciences (Finland)

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**ABSTRACT**

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<p><b>Abstract</b></p> <p>Sign language interpreters must continuously make context-based decisions (Dean &amp; Pollard, 2013). Those decisions need to articulate the normative material available in the profession, mainly the code of ethics and role metaphors, in view of the specific characteristics of a given assignment. In this regard, different studies have reported a gap between what Dean and Pollard have called “rhetoric versus de facto” practice (Dean &amp; Pollard, 2005), meaning that what interpreters acknowledge as how the profession should conduct its work differs from what interpreters do in their current practice. In a previous study conducted with experienced Spanish Sign Language interpreters (Calle-Alberdi, 2015a) a pattern seemed to come up: some of the interpreters used the term “common sense” in their narratives when talking about a decision that did not fully comply to did not fully comply to these interpreters' understanding of the code of ethics. This study is an initial attempt to describe and analyse how Spanish Sign Language interpreters understand the profession’s normative messages. In this way, it examines the reasoning patterns that emerge when Spanish Sign Language interpreters use the term “common sense” as an explanation for their decisions.</p> <p>In this study, a meta-ethical approach is adopted to explore and describe how Spanish Sign Language interpreters understand and talk about ethics. Ten sign language interpreters, all with at least ten years of experience in the field, participated in the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and subsequently analysed using a thematic analysis methodology with an inductive-deductive approach. The data suggest, among other things, that Spanish practitioners use the term “common sense” to refer to and legitimise decisions that tend to be liberal, meaning they imply action (Dean &amp; Pollard, 2005, 2013). These decisions usually contradict what interpreters understand the normative messages stipulate, especially the ideas conveyed by the “conduit” role metaphor that conveys the idea of the interpreter as a professional whose professional responsibility implies not going beyond the mere transfer of messages between event participants. However, the participants justify their decisions by calling for consideration of the factors present in a given situation, meaning making context-based decisions. This approach seems to contradict the deontological, or rule-based, approach to ethics present in most of the normative material available for Spanish interpreters.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> sign language, interpreting, ethics, meta-ethics, decision-making, common sense	

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## **Declaration**

I declare that the thesis embodies the results of my own work and has been composed by myself. Where appropriate within the thesis I have made full acknowledgement to the work and ideas of others. No other sources or tools have been used other than those cited in the reference list. I understand that as an examination candidate I am required to abide by the examination regulations and to conform to my university's regulations, discipline and ethical policy

Lourdes Calle-Alberdi,  
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## Table of contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	5
1.1. The sign language interpreting profession in Spain	6
1.2. Research questions	8
<b>2. Literature Review</b>	10
2.1. Introduction	10
2.2. Community interpreting and ethics	10
2.3. Codes of ethics	12
2.4. The interpreter's role metaphors	16
2.5. Flexible ethical decision-making within a normative frame	20
2.6. Common sense	23
2.7. Conclusion	26
<b>3. Methodology</b>	28
3.1. Introduction	28
3.2. Participants	29
3.3. Method	30
3.4. Interview script	30
3.5. Data analysis	33
<b>4. Analysis</b>	35
4.1. Introduction	35
4.2. Perception of the normative messages	35
4.2.1. <i>Code of ethics</i>	35
4.2.2. <i>Role metaphors</i>	39
4.3. Challenges to normative messages	45
4.3.1. <i>Characterisation of "common sense"</i>	46
4.3.2. <i>"Common sense" versus code of ethics</i>	49
4.4. "Common sense" decision-making	53
4.4.1. <i>Problem setting</i>	54
4.4.2. <i>Decisions</i>	55
4.4.3. <i>Justifications</i>	56
4.5. "Common sense" as a justification device	59
4.6. Conclusion	60
<b>5. Discussion</b>	63
5.1. Limitations of the study	70
5.2. Recommendations	71
<b>6. References</b>	74
<b>7. Appendices</b>	78
7.1. Appendix 1: Deontological code of sign language interpreters and guide-interpreters of Spain	78
7.2. Appendix 2: Interview script	81
7.3. Appendix 3: Interviews transcripts	84

## 1. Introduction

The decisions made by sign language interpreters can have a significant impact on service users' lives (Cokely, 2000). For this reason, practitioners are required to reflectively think about the decisions they make (Cokely, 2000; Dean, 2015). To be aware of the reasons behind a given decision is essential in order to conduct the work in a conscious, responsible manner. Given the many possible decisions available means that interpreters have a significant amount of freedom in their work. "With this freedom comes the responsibility to make informed choices" (Harrington & Turner, 2002, p.13). As interpreting is a regulated profession, these informed decisions should be made with a view to both professional ethics and service effectiveness.

In some studies, authors have presented a mismatch between the belief system about how the profession should conduct its work and the actual practice of interpreters (Angelelli, 2004; Dean & Pollard, 2005; Tate & Turner, 2002). This is what Dean and Pollard (2005) have termed the gap between "rhetoric versus de facto" practice. Consumers and less experienced interpreters tend to understand the profession by focusing exclusively on the faithful rendition of the source text into the target text, not taking into consideration other extra-linguistic factors that might influence the translation process and their behavioural decisions (ibid., p.261). The impact that the context and the interaction among participants have on the interpreting practice seems to be mostly learnt not in training programmes but instead after years of professional experience (ibid., p.263). Dean and Pollard affirm that "when significant gaps exist between rhetoric and de facto practice, dangers of unexamined, unregulated, and unethical practice increase" (ibid., p.264).

A significant amount of the literature in the field of community and sign language interpreting is English-speaking, which also corresponds with some of the countries where the sign language interpreter profession has a longer history and development, especially the USA. Still, little research has been conducted in many countries where the profession already exists and is following its

own trajectory in terms of legislation, training and professional recognition. To advance the profession in a given territory requires taking into consideration the results of the research conducted in the countries with a longer professional history while at the same time looking at the specific contexts at national and regional levels. When considering the gap between rhetoric versus de facto practice presented by Dean and Pollard (2005), research needs to assess at the national level if such a gap exists and, if so, how it is articulated in a given context. For this endeavour, several steps need to be taken. An essential first step in determining what the current situation is and what changes are required in order to make the profession advance towards an improved ethical and effective practice is looking at how interpreters understand ethical practice and how they apply it in relation to their actual practice.

### **1.1. The sign language interpreting profession in Spain**

The development of the sign language interpreting profession around the world presents different realities. At the European level, the results of a survey conducted by de Wit (2012) among practitioners and associations from 40 different European countries and regions provided a comparative overview of the profession, showing great diversity. The length and content of the more than 60 training programmes available greatly differ across Europe. In view of this fact, it is likely that the approaches to ethical issues in training programmes are also diverse.

The first step taken towards the professionalization of sign language interpreters in Spain took place in 1987, when the first “Official Service of Mimic Interpreters [sic]” was established in Madrid (De los Santos Rodríguez & Lara Burgos, 2004, p.19). It consisted of an agreement between the CNSE<sup>1</sup> (National Association of the Deaf) and a regional public body in charge of Social Welfare. For the first time, the activity carried out by this group of people was officially acknowledged as a profession.

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<sup>1</sup> Confederación Estatal de Personas Sordas

In parallel to the organisation of interpreting services, the CNSE, which is responsible for the interpreters' training, made a strong effort to improve the training programmes available. Up until that moment, the content consisted exclusively of sign language, and it “did not make reference to technical and professional aspects of interpreting”<sup>2</sup> (ibid., p.20). In 1990, the first association of Spanish sign language interpreters, ILSE (Asociación: Intérpretes de Lenguaje de Signos de España) was established, and in 1994 they approved the first ethical code. One year later, the Spanish Government authorized the first official training of sign language interpreters. The corresponding curriculum was published in 1997 (*Real Decreto 1266/1997, de 24 de julio, por el que se establece el currículo del ciclo formativo de grado superior correspondiente al título de Técnico superior en Interpretación de la Lengua de Signos, 1997*), and the programme was launched in 1998. This training programme was a standardised two year full-time post-secondary vocational training programme, offered by different training institutions throughout the territory. In the curriculum, there was just one short mention of ethics, namely “Deontological code and professional rules”<sup>3</sup>, under the overarching section “Professional Resources”<sup>4</sup>.

Since that date, many changes have occurred in the field at different levels. Among them, one of the most relevant was the approval in 2007 of the law that acknowledged the two Spanish signed languages, Spanish and Catalan (*Ley 27/2007, de 23 de octubre, por la que se reconocen las lenguas de signos españolas y se regulan los medios de apoyo a la comunicación oral de las personas sordas, con discapacidad auditiva y sordociegas, 2007*). At present, the profession is about to take a giant step forward by moving its training programme from vocational training to university level, becoming a bachelor’s degree. An inside look at the current state of the profession at the national level is imperative in order to assure that those needs identified as most relevant and urgent are addressed at this new stage. However, at the national level, the research conducted in the field is still at a very early stage and little information can be found to inform and guide this process.

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<sup>2</sup> Original in Spanish: “no se hacía referencia a los aspectos técnicos y profesionales de la interpretación”

<sup>3</sup> Original in Spanish: “Código deontológico y normas profesionales”

<sup>4</sup> Original in Spanish: “Recursos profesionales”

Dean and Pollard have classified the interpreting profession as a practice profession, in contrast to technical ones (Dean & Pollard, 2005, 2013). Technical professions are those in which the technical knowledge and skills related to the specific field allow the professional to do effective work. On the contrary, in the practice professions, in addition to the technical competencies required, there is another important factor practitioners have to deal with constantly: the unpredictable nature of human interactions (Dean & Pollard, 2013, p.72). This requires practitioners make context-based decisions that go beyond conveying meaning from one language to another (Dean & Pollard, 2005). How Spanish Sign Language interpreters understand the profession and articulate their understanding of the professional ethical principles within their daily practice remains practically unexamined. This research is an initial exploration of the topic and aims to provide an initial picture of the ethical discourse and decision-making processes of Spanish Sign Language interpreters.

## **1.2. Research questions**

In 2015 I conducted a previous study among novice and experienced Spanish Sign Language interpreters about how they articulated the fidelity tenet when making decisions. In that study, I identified a gap between what interpreters understood as the norm and what they actually did in their daily practice (Calle-Alberdi, 2015b). During the interviews, three out of five of the seasoned interpreters spontaneously used the expression “common sense” when referring to decisions that they understood did not fully comply with what was stated in the code of ethics. When looking at the decisions interpreters make, it is not enough to look at their behaviour but also to examine “how interpreters come to conceptualise ethically troubling material and right action” (Dean, 2014, p.72). In this context, the use of the expression “apply common sense” seemed to follow a pattern, although an in-depth examination of this issue was beyond the scope of that study.

According to the content of the interviews, it was hypothesized that the popular expression “apply common sense” could hide a thicket of ideas associated with professional ethics, norms and decisions, justifying decisions that were per-



ceived by interpreters as deviating from the norm. For this reason, it was decided to further analyse how Spanish Sign Language interpreters talk about professional ethics and decisions, and to explore the meaning of the expression “apply common sense” when referring to professional ethical decision-making. In this regard, this study is a first attempt to explore the reasoning of Spanish Sign Language interpreters when making ethical decisions. This topic has been formulated into two research questions:

- How do Spanish Sign Language interpreters understand the profession’s normative messages?
- What are the reasoning patterns that emerge when Spanish Sign Language interpreters use the term “common sense” as an explanation for their decisions?

When practitioners refer to “common sense” to describe their decision-making process when solving problematic situations, it is hypothesized that they make their decisions at an intuitive level, without conscious reflection. Nevertheless, the professionally regulated practice that is the reason for the inclusion of the sign language interpreter training at university level requires these decisions to become conscious and, therefore, examined.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Introduction**

There are various central concepts in the field of community interpreting that have informed the development of the current research. In addition to the bibliography on community interpreting, the literature of interest is in the area of professional ethics, both in the community interpreting field and other related disciplines. First, the key role of ethics in the development of community interpreting profession is presented. Then, in the next two sections, two different materials with normative weight in the profession are examined: codes of ethics and role metaphors. Afterwards, different aspects of the decision-making process are presented and connected to ethical normative frameworks. Finally, the concept of “common sense” as presented in the literature is presented.

### **2.2. Community interpreting and ethics**

Throughout the history of the interpreting profession, ethics has been a key element at the heart of the profession. Logically, this is not unique to this professional field, since “professional practice is predominantly a moral enterprise” (Bebeau, 2002, p.271). However, the term ethics is polysemous and, therefore, seems to generate some confusion as to its meaning. Hill (2004) revised different definitions of professional ethics and came to the conclusion that one of the aspects they all share is the consideration of “responsibility held in common”. Nevertheless, Hill stated that when professionals refer to ethics sometimes it is not clear whether they are referring to codes, values, standards, etc. (ibid., p.131). When referring to the counselling profession, Hill used the term “standard of care” to refer to a “socially negotiated set of norms by which the conduct of counsellors is judged” (ibid., p.138), among which codes of ethics are a particular subset. However, although these documents provide standards for practitioners, these still have to use their judgment skills and make decisions considering a given context.

Codification of ethics has been essential to all the professions (Cokely, 2000). The first written standards dictated to regulate the behaviour of interpreters can be traced back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the Spanish Crown enacted laws for its colonised territories (Pöchhacker, 2004, p.164, citing Bowen 1995). Four centuries later, in 1957, the AIC (International Association of Conference Interpreters) would elaborate for the first time a code for practitioners created by the profession itself. In 1965 the first code of ethics in the sign language interpreting field was approved at the national level in the USA (Cokely, 2000) and it would have a significant impact on spoken languages community interpreting standards (Pöchhacker, 2004). The adoption of the RID code (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, USA) was considered by some scholars to be the beginning of the professional stage of sign language interpreting in the USA (Swabey & Mickelson, 2008). In addition to issues such as training or official recognition, among others, professionalism is associated with the “willingness to be regulated in the interests of safeguarding appropriate (ethical) standards of practice” (Harrington & Turner, 2002, p.8)

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as part of the professionalization processes occurring in different countries, and the parallel development of academic research, the area of translation and interpreting studies produced numerous publications related to the issue of professional ethics. Especially in the field of sign language interpreting, ethical issues received significant attention by researchers (Pöchhacker, 2004).

Dean (2015), following the professional ethics taxonomy used by Beauchamp & Childress (1994), classified the ethics literature existing in the community interpreting field as normative, descriptive or meta-ethical. The field of professional ethics can be divided between two broad subfields: normative and non-normative ethics (Beauchamp & Childress, 1994). The normative approach presents standards of right action. As Beauchamp and Childress put it, the normative approach tries to answer the question, “Which general norms for the guidance and evaluation of conduct are worthy of moral acceptance and for what reasons?” (Beauchamp & Childress, 1994, p.4). The other broad strand of studies on ethics, non-normative ethics, comprises two broad branches of studies:

descriptive ethics and meta-ethics. Descriptive ethics studies observe and analyse moral behaviour, and investigate how people reason and act (ibid., p.5). The other subfield within non-normative ethics is that of meta-ethics, which comprises the analysis of those tools used in ethics, such as the terms and the methods used for reasoning (ibid). In the community interpreting field, most of the literature can be classified within the normative and descriptive categories, and only a few studies can be found with a meta-ethical perspective that focus on how ethics are understood and articulated by the profession (Dean, 2015). Beauchamp and Childress (1994) described the interrelation among the three types of professional ethics approach, affirming that no sharp distinction should be drawn between them. This study adopts a meta-ethical approach, looking at how interpreters understand professional ethics. However, it also relies on normative and descriptive ethics, and explores the notions about normative materials and description of practitioners' current practice.

Normative materials establish what is conceived as ethical practice. Among them, codes of ethics have a central role. Nevertheless, one of the peculiarities of this professional field is the specific weight that some descriptive devices, such as the interpreter role metaphors, have acquired in shaping the normative ideal, becoming a normative material itself (Dean, 2015). As Dean affirms: "to put it in meta-ethical terms, the function of descriptive ethics is mistaken for the function of normative ethics"(ibid., p. 240).

In the following sections, two types of materials with normative weight -codes of ethics and interpreter role metaphors- will be further explored. Moreover, the main debates about their nature, normative weight, and articulation in current practice will be presented.

### **2.3. Codes of ethics**

Codes of ethics are among some of the professions' sources for norms. In addition, other materials have a normative weight, such as text books and manuals (Hill, 2004). Dean mentions other normative events that take place throughout a practitioners' training and professional life that can have a similar impact on decision-making, such as interactions with trainers and service users (2015, p.36).

In the shaping process of reasoning patterns for articulating ethical decisions, the normative material available for sign language interpreters plays a key role. Dean, citing Anderson (2003) and Harris (1990), affirms that “norms and normative messages might not change behaviour in the moment but they can leave an affective and psychological imprint on the memory processes associated with decision-making.” (Dean, 2015, p.18)

According to Hoza (2003), the main aspiration of a code of ethics is to “delineate the ethical standard practice of the profession” and protect both practitioners and service users (*ibid.*, p. 12). Codes of ethics have a regulatory function, aiming to ensure that the interests of service users are considered in the first place (Harrington & Turner, 2002). Cokely points to the collective agreement endorsed by the code, an agreement that involves both the members of the profession and general public (Cokely, 2000; Leneham & Napier, 2003).

Hale (2007) dedicated a chapter of her volume “Community Interpreting” to the codes of ethics of the profession, for both signed and spoken language interpreters. According to Hale, “A professional code of ethics provides guidelines for practitioners on how to conduct themselves ethically for the benefit of the clients they serve, the profession they represent and themselves as practitioners” (*ibid.*, p.103). Hale affirmed that the codes present the highest ethical standards interpreters should strive to achieve. On the contrary, Hill (2004), when referring to professional ethical codes, explained that they can be written either reflecting ideals or defining minimum acceptable standards of behaviour (*ibid.*, p.139). Nevertheless, as shown by some of the quotations in Hale's study, sometimes there is some confusion among practitioners and scholars about whether the code of ethics stands for what is ideal practice or for what is acceptable.

Different studies have been conducted to analyse and compare different codes of ethics, including both spoken and signed languages. Hale (2007) conducted research on a variety of interpreter ethical codes. Sixteen codes from nine countries were selected at random. Hale analysed, among other issues, the presence of the main ethical tenets in these 16 codes. She found that not all the

codes mention the three most frequent tenets: confidentiality (in 81.25% of the analysed codes), accuracy (in 75%) and impartiality (68.75%). Hale was unable to clarify whether the absence of some tenets in some codes was due to not considering this tenet necessary or because it was taken for granted. It is noteworthy that in two of the codes, it was stated in an explicit manner that professional interpreters need to exercise their judgement when applying the code to the practice.

Another study exclusively comparing sign language interpreters' codes of ethics from twelve countries was conducted by De los Santos Rodríguez & Reguera Guerrero (2002). This study yielded similar results to the one presented by Hale. In this case, confidentiality and neutrality/impartiality were the two tenets with the highest presence in the selected codes, given that they were present in all of them. This study confirmed that different national organisations tend to have a similar approach to the ethical code, sharing most of the main tenets. What remains unexamined is if all the tenets are given the same consideration. In relation to this, Leneham & Napier (2003), in describing the case in Australia, stated that some of the listed principles such as "Professional Development" are "often neglected or seen as one of the less-important principles-a long way behind the Holy Trinity of Confidentiality, Impartiality and Accuracy" (ibid., p.92). No comparative studies among codes have been found that explore the potential hierarchy between ethical code tenets.

Logically, codes of ethics do not provide a detailed explanation of what has to be done for every single potential situation interpreters might face during their professional lives. As Harrington & Turner put it, "It is more like a set of cartographic principles which will enable you to make maps to assist your everyday journey through unknown terrain" (2002, p.9). Ethical codes aim to be at the same time specific and general, making possible the application of the code principles to a wide range of situations (Leneham & Napier, 2003). Hale (2007) and other authors such as Fritsch-Rudser (1986) highlighted the key role of the values that stand behind the code tenets. The underlying values of the code are what Hoza called "the foundations of the code" (2003, p.21). These values are the core component of the code, and to reflectively think about them as well as

articulating them requires appropriate training (Hale, 2007). It is necessary to deeply understand the moral constructs that the code embodies in order to use it as a source of support when making decisions (Fritsch-Rudser, 1986).

In the literature, numerous scholars have discussed some identified limitations of the codes of ethics. In this regard, Llewellyn-Jones & Lee affirmed that “The codes, as they stand, merely represent the prototypical naive lay-person’s understanding, and hence expectations, of what we do” (2014, p.146). This is an arguable statement, since in most cases, the codes were written by the sign language interpreters associations or related bodies and, therefore, in principle the codes present the way the profession understands its values and scope of practice.

A number of scholars have described the deontological approach of codes of ethics as problematic (Cokely, 2000; Dean & Pollard, 2011; Llewellyn-Jones & Lee, 2014; Tate & Turner, 2002). The articulation of the codes of ethics in a deontological manner implies disregarding the potential consequences that a course of action might have in cases where adherence to the pre-established code tenets prevails. The deontological approach prescribes specific behaviours and allows for no exceptions (Cokely, 2000). In contrast, a teleological approach would consider the potential consequences of a decision at the time it is made (Dean & Pollard, 2013; Lingas, 2000). Both deontology and teleology articulate ethical values, but in the case of teleology, the values come into play when weighing the consequences of potential actions (Dean & Pollard, 2013).

In the Spanish case, the ethical code, namely “Deontological Code”<sup>5</sup> was approved by the FILSE<sup>6</sup> general assembly in 2002 (Spanish Federation of Sign Language Interpreters and Guide-Interpreters), with obligatory compliance for all Spanish sign language interpreters (attached in Appendix 1). It contains seven articles, and has a deontological approach to ethics (Calle-Alberdi, 2015a) although some of its statements seem to call for some flexibility. For example, under article five, it reads “[the interpreter] Shall maintain a flexible attitude on

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<sup>5</sup> This is the original name of the code in Spanish: “Código Deontológico”

<sup>6</sup> Original in Spanish: “Federación Española de Intérpretes de Lengua de Signos y Guías-Intérpretes”

interpreting and guide-interpreting assignments". In order to understand the approach to normative ethics in the profession in Spain, it is also interesting to look at the only general textbook available for sign language interpreting students (De los Santos Rodríguez & Lara Burgos, 2004). This publication devotes one chapter to ethics, namely "Deontological Norms"<sup>7</sup>. In these eight pages, the code of ethics is reproduced and then analysed, pointing out the so-called three "main ethical principles" (neutrality, confidentiality and fidelity). In addition, the other "ethical principles" identified are also described: training, professional skills, professional fees, adaptation to communication, personal benefit, time and preparation, punctuality, adequate environment and conditions, substitutions and attitudes towards colleagues. No further elaboration on ethics or decision-making is presented in this material.

#### **2.4. The interpreter's role metaphors**

Throughout the history of the profession, codes of ethics have coexisted with the ethical contributions of role metaphors (Dean, 2015). The topic of the interpreter's role has been of major importance in interpreting studies, especially in relation to community-based settings. The concept of role comes from sociology and is defined as a "set of more or less normative behavioural expectations associated with a 'social position'" (Pöchhacker, 2004, p.147) and refers to behavioural expectations associated with practitioners held by service participants and society at large. Dean (2015) gave an account of a debate among some scholars in regard to the appropriateness of the use of this widespread term at the macro-moral level, meaning issues dealing with society-wide structures (Dean, 2015, citing Rest 1984). However, different scholars have acknowledged its impact at the micro-moral or decision-making level (ibid., pp.43-44).

Over the years, different role models have been developed and shared by the profession, shaping the way interpreters think about their scope of practice (Janzen & Korpinski, 2005). It is not uncommon to find publications in the field in which the notions of the code and the role are intertwined. For example, Hale affirmed that every interpreting code of ethics aims to set clear expectations for

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<sup>7</sup> Original in Spanish: "Deontological Norms"



the interpreter's role. In the same vein, Pöchhacker (2004) stated that the role is a "integral part of professional codes of ethics and practice" (Pöchhacker, 2004, p.147).

Throughout the history of the interpreting profession, different metaphors have been developed to describe what that interpreters' role should be like (Dean, 2015; Roy, 1993). The metaphors have been created by the profession itself to help understand the work carried out by interpreters (Roy, 1993), but over the years they have become an ethical guidance device (Dean, 2015; Roy, 1993). In the literature, at least six role metaphors have been described: helper, conduit, communication-facilitator and bi-bi (bilingual-bicultural specialist), ally and member of a team (Dean, 2015). Roy (1993), when examining the first four role metaphors, argued that in essence there are basically two models: one that implies extreme personal involvement (mainly associated with the "helper model") and another which covers from extreme to not so extreme non-involvement of the interpreter (this last one was partially identified with the "conduit model"). Among these metaphors, the conduit model has had the highest impact on practitioners' understanding of the profession and many publications have examined its nature and application.

The "helper model" coincides with the pre-history of the professionalization of sign language interpreters. The term refers to the people, usually family members and friends, who accompanied deaf relatives and interpreted for them. However, that activity might also be mixed with doses of advice, information selection, decision-making on their behalf, etc. (Swabey & Mickelson, 2008; Tate & Turner, 2002). In the move towards professionalization, the model for interpreters turned to what scholars have been calling the "conduit model", using Reddy's term (Reddy 1979, cited in Wadensjö, 1998, p.7). The conduit model describes the expected behaviour of interpreters to be the following: "transfer language meaning without having any personal involvement in that transfer" (Roy, 1993, p.135). Moreover, they should remain uninvolved unless the message transfer is challenged (Dean, 2014). Among other implications, the profession took this approach as a way of empowering the Deaf community (Tate & Turner, 2002, p.54).

When analysing the implications of this model, Roy (1993) affirmed that the conduit is narrowly focused on language form and content, and portrays the interpreter as a passive participant through whom the messages of service users pass. According to the impact this metaphor has had on the profession, Hsieh (2008), citing other sources, referred to the conduit model as the default role. In this regard, different images have been used to convey this conduit notion: the interpreter as a bridge, a machine or a telephone line, among others (Roy 1993, p.134).

The findings of the works of Wadensjö (1998), Metzger (1999), and Roy (2000) present different examples of how, in working, interpreters did not restrict themselves to the behaviour defined by the conduit model. Their works, drawing on sociolinguistics, conceptualised the interpreters as active participants in the process of co-construction of meaning that characterises dialogical communication. In this respect, meaning is understood not to be created by a person on her own, but in collaboration with the rest of the participants in the communicative event. Accordingly, the mechanical view on the interpretation process presented by the conduit model is challenged (Dean, 2015).

Different notions have been presented to oppose the implications of the conduit model. For example, the conduit model has been related to the concept of the “invisibility” of the interpreter, or lack of agency (Angelelli, 2004). In contrast, Angelelli developed the concept of “visibility” of the interpreter, referring to both the active role in co-construction of meaning and the power interpreters possess in influencing the outcome of a given interaction. Another approach to the role issue has been that of Llewellyn-Jones & Lee, (2014) who argued against the idea of one fixed role for all situations, and instead developed the concept of “role-space”, based on the fact that every interaction is different.

The discussion about the interpreter’s role has already been going on for decades, and the issue has been analysed by a number of researchers, trying to find a better metaphor that would portray in a more accurate way what interpreters do (Dean, 2015). For example, one of the most recently developed met-

aphors, the “member of a team” metaphor, takes into consideration the context in which the interpretation takes place and expects interpreters to engage with the aim of the setting (ibid.). According to Dean, researchers in the field have tended to describe practitioners’ behaviour which at least partially contradicts the conduit model. Thus, a new metaphor has been created to portray what research has found to be the actual behaviour of interpreters. As stated by Dean, “metaphors almost legitimise behaviour” because they acquire normative weight and, therefore, are considered an ethical option (ibid., p.224). Dean argues that role metaphors are descriptive materials that do not use normative language and constructions. In this regard, Dean acknowledges the input of sociological approaches to the community interpreting practice, although she argues that when the discussion moves from description to standards of right action, terms and constructs associated with normative ethics should be used. (ibid.).

Therefore, role metaphors, initially created as a descriptive device to explain the interpreter’s function and scope of practice, have acquired a normative function. Nevertheless, this fact, among other issues, seems to have had some consequences on the understanding the profession has about ethical practice. Turner & Brown (2002) cited Roy (1989) explaining how interpreters since at least the early 70’s experience confusion about the limits of their professional practice. Roy (1993) cited Fritsch-Rudser’s statement at an interpreters’ meeting in 1988: “Interpreters don’t have a problem with ethics, they have a problem with the role”. In this respect, Fritsch-Rudser (1986) pointed out the fact that some of the normative messages endorsed by interpreters were a result of role conventions not directly related to the code of ethics. However, these role conceptions were understood by practitioners to be part of the code.

Considering the confusion in the field as to what the normative message is and how it relates to the codes of ethics, in the next section, different perspectives on how these messages are articulated when making decisions will be presented.

## **2.5. Flexible ethical decision-making within a normative frame**

In the previous sections, the concept of normative and descriptive ethics has been presented, and different materials available in the field (codes of ethics and role metaphors) have been described and analysed, relating them to these categories. Dean (2015) pointed out the use of the term role and the use of metaphors as behavioural guidance as something unique to the interpreting profession, which does not meet the professional ethical constructs available in other professions. Dean argued that the ethical development of the profession is still at a very early stage when compared to other professions' ethics, and made a call for approaching ethical normative issues with a normative perspective (*ibid.*).

Before Dean, other authors in the field had already called for the profession to return to normative ethics. Chesterman (1993) and Pym (2001) had already expressed their concern in the field of translation studies. Although some studies in the field have presented interpreters' behaviour as flexible and not fully compliant with their understanding of ethical normative messages (e.g. Angelelli, 2004; Tate & Turner, 2002), the dominant ethical thinking of interpreters presented "a prescriptive force running through much of the participants' reasoning" although it "is not the desirable form that sets standards and provides behavioural guidance" (Dean, 2015, p. 207). In other words, if the way of reasoning is influenced by prescription in such a way that the specific characteristics of a given context are not taken into consideration, the normative approach seems to be ineffective.

A professional field such as community interpreting involves practitioners making many moment-to-moment decisions, according to the different contexts they work in. Harrington & Turner affirmed that "there is no one-size-fits-all formula which will make the tough decisions on behalf of the practitioner" (2002, p.13). That implies that interpreters have both the freedom to make decisions and the duty to comply with obligations (*ibid.*).

Interpreting is presented by Dean & Pollard (2005, 2013) as a practice profession, such as teaching or law, meaning that consideration of the context and

human interactions taking place are of utmost importance for doing effective work. Technical knowledge about languages, cultures and codes of ethics are not sufficient; they must be complemented with “input, exchange, and judgement regarding the consumers they are serving in a specific environment and in a specific communicative situation” (Dean & Pollard, 2005, p.259). Improving ethical reasoning has been pointed out as necessary in several practice professions (Dean, 2015; Kitchener, 1986).

Normative ethics have different potential approaches, although the interpreting field has traditionally identified normative ethics with deontology. However, there are other normative constructs such as teleology that are used in the education of other practice professions (Dean, 2015). “Specified principlism” is the term used in ethics to refer to the articulation of ethical principles within a given context (ibid., p.52). Beauchamp & Childress (1994) presented this approach, relating the premises of the common-morality theory and the principled-based ethical reasoning. “Common morality” was defined as “socially approved norms of human conduct” (1994, p.6). For ethical deliberation, values in conflict in a given situation have to be balanced against each other (Hundert, 1987).

The publication of Beauchamp and Childress (1994) presented the medical profession with four core ethical principles: autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence and justice. These are understood as guiding principles for ethical decision-making. This model has been adopted by other practice professions, such as counselling (Cottone & Claus, 2000), although in the literature about community interpreting only the work of Dean (2015) has approached professional ethical constructs considering these four values. Therefore, it is not a widespread perspective on ethics in the community-interpreting field.

Ethical decision-making involves various potential choices (Dean & Pollard, 2013; Hoza, 2003). It has been described as right versus right choice (Kidder, 1995). As mentioned in sections 2.3 and 2.4 of this bibliographic review, there seems to be some confusion in the profession as regards the articulation of normative ethics. In addition, interpreters work in different settings, which add more complexity to the articulation of ethical constructs. Dean & Pollard (2013)

argued that there are more values interpreters articulate in their daily practice than those underpinning the code of ethics, which are mainly related to the autonomy of the service user and conveyed by the conduit metaphor. They suggested there are other values that come into play but have not been explored to the same extent as those referring to the user's autonomy, such as the values of the settings they work in. Dean and Pollard called for further exploration into the values articulated by practitioners in their daily practice (ibid., p.92).

Dean and Pollard developed the Demand Control Schema (DC-S) as a paradigm to understand interpreting practice (Dean & Pollard, 2005, 2011, 2013). The DC-S identifies two main elements to be considered when analysing interpreted events in order to make effective decisions: demands and controls. Demands are defined as "a factor that rises to a level of significance that will, or should, impact the decision-making involved in your work" (Dean & Pollard 2013, p.4). Controls are the resources the interpreter has to respond to the existing demands. DC-S also takes into consideration the values behind the decisions made, and presents a range of potential decisions that practitioners can make that are both effective and ethical. Effective practice is defined as the result of a balance between demands occurring in the situation and the controls the interpreter applies to response to them.

When making decisions the potential impact of those choices on the service users must be considered, while also ensuring that the principles and standards of the profession are met (Dean & Pollard, 2005, p.270). Dean & Pollard described the range of potential decisions that are both effective and ethical as a line that goes from a liberal to a conservative end, including a spectrum of potential choices, about which practitioners will have different opinions (Dean & Pollard 2005, 2013). In this context, "conservative" stands for decisions that are more cautious and tend to inaction, while "liberal" stands for those decisions that involve more action. The interpreting profession has tended to value the conservative decisions, in line with the deontological ethical rubric created by the idea of invisibility associated with the conduit model (Dean & Pollard, 2005, p.273).

Decision-making has been also examined from the perspective of professional education. Dean & Pollard (2011) have indicated that sign language interpreters, especially the experienced ones, might have the ability to make effective decisions, but failed in explaining the reasoning behind them (Dean & Pollard, 2011). Cottone & Claus (2000, p.281), citing Handelsman, affirmed that ethics training should not happen by “osmosis”, but should instead be part of professional training programmes. In this respect, Kitchener affirmed that students should be able to learn to reflect on the relation “among moral intuition, moral rules, ethical principles, and the law” (1986, p.309). In Spain, in view of the short mentions of ethical issues (namely, “deontological norms”) in both the training programme official curriculum and the only text-book covering the issue of ethics, it seems that how practitioners learn to make ethical decisions in the field might be something that is not deeply analysed in their training programmes. In this connection, Kitchener (1986) found that in relation to other practice professions, ethical training tended to cover only the content of the code and its application, and this was an incomplete approach. Thinking tools are required in order to critically analyse and apply the codes professionals have to abide by (ibid., p. 306).

Making decisions can be an intuitive process beyond our awareness, but it is necessary to develop critical thinking and decision-making skills in relation to our professional field to ensure the quality of the service provided (Dean, 2015). In this connection, in the next section the concept of “common sense”, present in the ethical narratives of Spanish Sign Language interpreters, will be further explored, and its links with decision-making and interpreting practice will be presented.

## **2.6. Common sense**

“Apply common sense”. This is a widely used expression in all kind of spheres, not only in informal contexts but also in professional ones. In various publications related to interpreting professional ethics, a call for using “common sense” was found. For example, Hale (2007), when describing the three main different attitudes towards codes of ethics she had found in her study, referred to what she suggests to be the most suitable attitude: “the measured attitude, mostly

from interpreters with training who view the code as a guide requiring professional common sense” (2007, p.102). In this respect, Tate and Turner criticised how regulatory bodies expect practitioners to use the code as a guideline and “(...) letting ‘common sense’ decide. The problem is that ‘common sense’ is not common to all” (Tate & Turner, 2002, p.64). As mentioned in the introduction, the interviews conducted as part of the study carried out prior to this research suggest that the expression “common sense” is frequently used by Spanish Sign Language interpreters when referring to some kinds of decisions that do not fully comply with their understanding of normative messages. However, in both the interpreting literature and in the case of Spanish interpreters, the exact meaning of “common sense” remains unclear. What all these different uses have in common is that “common sense” seems to be identified with a “device” that can be applied when ethical decisions have to be made.

“Common sense” is not a young term in the field of moral philosophy. Millstone (2012) gave an account of different definitions of the term throughout the history of Western thought. From Aristotle (“a sixth sense combining impressions from the other five”) to modern history, the meaning has changed over time (ibid., p.535). However, it is interesting to have a quick look at the historical development of the term through the lens of the theory of social representations. Millstone, who works in the area of social psychology, reviewed literature on social representations, finding a tendency towards identifying “common sense” through a contrast with scientific positivism, opposing two kinds of thought: formalistic and naturalistic. Citing the work of Moscovici and Hewstone (1983), Millstone pointed out the opposition between two concepts related to knowledge and acquisition of knowledge: “‘standard thinking’ is ‘logical’, pursuing ‘truth’ through ‘valid’ reasoning; while ‘non-standard thinking’ corresponds to a more ‘natural’ form of thinking, a native one which is acquired directly without any special training” (2012, p. 536, quotation marks in the original).

In a similar manner, Daly (2014) citing Lonergan (1972) described common sense and theory (or science) as a dyad operating in different domains of knowledge: “common sense” operates from description and theory, and science operates from the perspective of explanation. Lonergan classified this relation



between them as “complementary” (p.199). Daly related “common sense” to pragmatism, which aims to determine “what works” in the situation at hand (ibid., p.194). As presented by Daly, Lonergan argued that “common sense” takes into consideration the body of knowledge of a given group and “it withholds judgement until it determines what it needs under present circumstances” (ibid., p.200). According to his description, the generalities of “common sense” do not serve to generate theory because they cannot be generalised and used in other contexts. They are focused on a given moment in a given place. This author also posed a critique of “common sense”: “What stands out in commonsense eclecticism is its security in making judgments while discounting the importance of understanding” (ibid. p.201).

“Common sense” as a device that leads decision-making in a professional context is a problematic issue. No studies have been found in the literature on the specific weight of “common sense” in the decision-making of interpreters. However, it is interesting to look at other studies conducted in this regard in relation to other practice professions, such as kindergarten teachers and nurses. In the study conducted by Hanssen & Alpers (2010) about decision-making among nurses in Norway, they argued that their theoretical framework draws on utilitarianism (“weighting the needs of the many against the needs of the few”, ibid., p.202) and “common-sense morality”, which the authors identified with “their gut feeling of right and wrong, a feeling that seemed to play an important part in their decision-making”. They concluded the study affirming that the nurses tend to embrace a “common-sense morality” rather than a utilitarian one. The authors claimed that “common-sense morality” was “relational in outlook” (2010, p.209) and, therefore, leaves room to consider empathy and other emotions when making decisions, while utilitarianism would not do so, due to its mechanistic nature.

In another study conducted by Steinnes (2014), two staff categories working in Norwegian kindergartens, assistants and teachers, were compared. On the one hand, the assistants, without formal training, and on the other hand, the teachers, formally qualified. The author looked at the work carried out in kindergartens and discussed whether that work was based on “common sense” to a

greater extent than professional qualifications. It suggested that “common sense” was understood as practical knowledge acquired on the spot, contrary to the knowledge formally acquired in training programmes. Although this study did not elaborate on decision-making, the opposition it presented between these two ideas is interesting: professional training and “common sense”.

Fritsch-Rudser (1986) is one of the few scholars in the interpreting studies field who briefly approached the topic of “common sense”. This author warned against the use of this expression when discussing ethical decision-making. He cited Webster’s dictionary where “common sense” is defined as “the unreflective views of ordinary men” (ibid., p.47). He claimed that common sense provides general answers for everyday questions, but not for complex ones, such as those one might face in one’s professional practice. This author referred to the area where professional decisions lie: ethics, which he defined as the “study of moral implications of actions”. Therefore, ethics involves reflection (Cokely, 2000; Fritsch-Rudser, 1986), in contrast to the notion of “common sense”, meaning “the avoidance of the thinking and reflection necessary for any professional endeavour” (Fritsch-Rudser, 1986, p.47).

## **2.7. Conclusion**

Normative ethics in the community-interpreting field comprise different materials with normative weight, such as codes of ethics and role metaphors. Codes of ethics tend to adopt rules-based perspectives (Cokely, 2000), and present standards of right practice by which practitioners have to abide by (Hale, 2007; Hoza, 2003; Leneham & Napier, 2003). In addition, role metaphors are another available material with normative weight (Dean, 2015) that interpreters take into consideration when making decisions, and describe legitimised behaviours under the presentation of metaphors (ibid.). Interpreting is a practice profession (Dean & Pollard, 2005, 2013), in which decisions have to be made moment-to-moment and taking into consideration a range of factors, or demands (Dean & Pollard, 2005, 2013). Different scholars have made a call for a return to a normative framework in the translation and interpreting field (Chesterman, 1993; Dean, 2015; Pym, 2001), and ethical approaches other than deontology have been presented in other practice professions. In this discussion about normati-

ty and flexibility, Spanish Sign Language interpreters presented “common sense” as a device they use to make decisions, although its ethical nature was questioned for a number of reasons. In the following sections, the specific articulation of normative messages and the meaning of “common sense” in the decision-making of Spanish practitioners will be further explored.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Introduction

Considering the very scarce academic research conducted in the sign language interpreting field in Spain, this study aims to be a first exploration into the specific area of community interpreters' normative constructs and reasoning patterns when making decisions.

The sign language interpreting field has traditionally identified normative ethics with deontological or rule-based approaches. The Spanish normative materials available (code of ethics, curriculum, and textbook) seem to suggest that deontology is the default approach to ethics in the field. In the field of metaphors, the ideas conveyed by the conduit metaphor have also been reported in the literature at the international level to have had a significant impact on interpreters' perception of what comprises ethical practice. However, a gap between what interpreters think is the normative ideal and what they do in their current practice has been reported by several scholars (Angelelli, 2004; Dean & Pollard 2005; Tate & Turner, 2002). This deviation from the perceived the normative ideal is what is hypothesised as what Spanish interpreters refer to when they use the term "common sense".

This investigation adopts a meta-ethical approach and looks at Spanish Sign Language interpreters' cognitive processes, rather than behavioural ones, analysing how they speak about ethics and decision-making in relation to their daily practice. In this regard, my two research questions are:

- How do Spanish Sign Language interpreters understand the profession normative messages?
- What are the reasoning patterns that emerge when Spanish Sign Language interpreters use the term "common sense" as an explanation for their decisions?

### 3.2. Participants

Ten interpreters were recruited for this study. The inclusion criterion was their professional experience in the community interpreting field, having at least ten years of practice. According to Mendoza (2012), novice and experienced interpreters make different ethical decisions based on their experience. Mendoza also affirms that experienced interpreters are able to identify more subtle ethical issues when discussing ethical dilemmas than novice interpreters.

For the recruitment of participants, a number of steps were taken. A tweet was posted on the social micro-blogging network Twitter, and invitations were sent to various contacts to be disseminated among colleagues meeting the inclusion criterion. Three of the five interpreters who had participated in a previous study conducted on fidelity (Calle-Alberdi, 2015b) were contacted again to participate in this study. Those three interpreters had used the term “common sense” when explaining the reasons behind some of the decisions made when presented with the study stimulus. It was considered that having those interpreters in the study cohort would provide an opportunity for having a deeper insight into their reasoning patterns by further exploring what they meant by “applying common sense” when making decisions in a professional assignment.

Ten experienced Spanish Sign Language interpreters were interviewed for the study. Eight of them were women and two men. The average age was 39.3 years and the participants had very similar ages (between 32 and 42 years old). Four of them had deaf relatives.

All of them were accredited as sign language interpreters by either the regional or the national association of the Deaf before official vocational training for sign language interpreters was available in Spain. Eight of them had subsequently qualified as interpreters by passing the official training qualification exams. All, except one, had university degrees.

The average number of years working in the field was 15.9 years. Most of them had mainly worked in community interpreting and educational settings (second-

ary and/or university level). Four of them had experience as interpreter trainers in the official training programme.

### **3.3. Method**

This study used a qualitative data approach, conducting semi-structured interviews as the data collection method. The aim of the interview was “to gain an understanding into the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Hale & Napier, 2013, p.95). The semi-structured approach involves the researcher presenting a number of prompt questions to the participants, to guide the conversation through the target topics. This is a flexible approach that allows participants to express their ideas and to raise issues not previously foreseen by the researcher. Moreover, it facilitates the interviewer further exploring participant responses.

Focus groups have been described as presenting a series of advantages in comparison to individual interviews (Fern 1983, cited by Hale & Napier, 2013, p.104), such as the wider range of information they can produce or the stimulation arising from the interaction between the participants. Nevertheless, ethical dialogue among interpreters, especially when dealing with normative ethics, might be a sensitive issue. For this reason, it was finally decided to conduct individual interviews in order to allow participants to express their beliefs and personal perspectives on the topics raised.

### **3.4. Interview script**

The interview conducted among interpreters followed a script that contained five different sections (see Appendix 2). Although the script was set in advance, different follow up questions were included in the interviews to clarify and further explore some of the issues raised by the participants.

The questions aimed to collect two main types of information, related to the research questions:

- How do Spanish Sign Language interpreters understand the profession’s normative messages?

- What are the reasoning patterns that emerge when Spanish Sign Language interpreters use the term “common sense” as an explanation for their decisions?

The interview script had the following structure:

1. Presentation by the interviewer of two hypothetical interpreting scenarios in which the fidelity tenet was at stake, accompanied by follow-up questions to explore the elements with impact on the situation to be considered (demands), their responses to those demands (controls), and their justification for their decisions. The scenarios were as follows:
  - a. “You are on an interpreting assignment with a deaf pregnant woman who is going for an ultrasound. You know that she does not want to know the sex of her baby, but the gynaecologist suddenly says ‘the baby girl is fine’”. This scenario was an adaptation of one of the scenarios used in research by Tate & Turner (2002).
  - b. “You interpret on a daily basis with 2<sup>nd</sup> ESO<sup>8</sup> grade students. There is a hearing student that frequently teases and insults a deaf student. Yesterday, the deaf student asked you not to interpret the insults from the hearing student because that makes him suffer. Today at a given moment the teacher momentarily left the classroom while the students were doing their homework. At that moment, at the back of the classroom, the hearing student made a derogatory remark in relation to the deaf student. The deaf student was focused on his homework and he did not realise there had been any comment”. This scenario was designed using some of the descriptions presented by experienced interpreters during the previous study conducted on fidelity (Calle-Alberdi, 2015b).
2. Presentation by the interviewer of three short statements about decisions made in relation to the first scenario presented under question one. These statements had been presented by experienced interpreters during the interviews conducted during the previous study on fidelity

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<sup>8</sup> Students around 12-13 years old

(Calle-Alberdi, 2015b). In all of them, the term “common sense” was mentioned when describing their decision-making process. Participants were asked for their understanding of those affirmations and for their opinion about them.

3. Presentation by the interviewer of three short statements about the code of ethics and the use of “common sense”. These comments had been made by experienced interpreters during the interviews conducted at the previous study in fidelity (Calle-Alberdi, 2015b). In all of them a certain kind of opposition between the two terms (code of ethics and “common sense”) was presented. Participants were asked for their understanding of those affirmations and their opinion about them.
4. Participants were asked to describe a situation they had experienced at work in which they had made a decision they could label as “applying common sense”.
5. Presentation by the interviewer of the definition of “common sense” made by the Spanish Royal Academy. Participants were asked to comment on it.

The two scenarios presented under question one had the fidelity tenet at stake due to the demands present during the situation. The first scenario had been already presented to the participants of the previous study conducted (Calle-Alberdi, 2015b). On that occasion, it proved to trigger the use of the expression “apply common sense” for decisions that might be considered by the practitioners as not fully compliant with the content of the ethical code. Dean (2014) affirmed that the interpreting profession accepts taking action only once the message transfer is compromised. In this connection, it was decided to present two scenarios in which fidelity was the ethical tenet at stake. It was hypothesised that this kind of prompt would generate rich responses in which the understanding of normative messages might be at odds with the decisions made.



As mentioned above, three of the participants in the previous study on fidelity (Calle- Alberdi, 2015b) were part of this study cohort. Considering the potential bias introduced by having three interpreters previously exposed to one of the stimuli while having seven for whom this would be the first time, a second scenario was added to the first question. This second scenario was set in a different setting (secondary school) and with different participants: teenage students and a (absent) teacher. Although most of the elements were different, the ethical tenet at stake was the same: fidelity to the message.

For the wording of the questions, accessible language was sought to enable participants to express themselves freely by making them feel comfortable. When designing the interview script, it was assumed that the participants would not be familiar with the Demand-Control Schema vocabulary, such as demands, controls, etc. The interview script (see Appendix 2) was piloted with two interpreters that were not in the participants' cohort. Both interpreters had five years of experience in the field. As a result of the progress of the pilot, some minor changes were introduced in the final script. Most of the changes had to do with the initial wording of some of the questions, as well as the terminology used by the interviewer when following up on some of the statements made by the participants. For example, in regards to the wording of the question, "What is the problem that you can identify in this situation?" was replaced by "Which elements present in this situation should be taken into consideration when making a decision?" The decision was made to facilitate participants the articulation of their reasoning and their analysis process.

### **3.5. Data analysis**

The two scenarios presented under question number one were, among other things, intended to spontaneously trigger the use of the expression "common sense" by the participants. However, contrary to what was initially expected in light of the results of the previous study on fidelity (Calle-Alberdi, 2015b), none of them used this term at this early stage of the interview to talk about their decisions. Nevertheless, in the second question, all of them understood and agreed with the use of the expression "common sense" when used to describe the type of decision-making presented at the statement prompts. From question

number two onwards, participants discussed and analysed professional decision-making, taking into consideration their understanding of the idea of “common sense”, allowing the collection of data related to the research questions.

The data collected provides information about two types of notions. On the one hand, participants expressed their beliefs, ideas and perceptions in regard to normative ethics. In this respect, their contributions present their belief systems about the norms they consciously articulate in their reasoning. On the other hand, under question four, participants were asked to provide an example of their professional life in which they could label the decisions they had made as “application of common sense”, or “common sense” decision-making. Under this question, participants were able to recount past decisions and the cognitive processes behind them. The information collected under this question provided material to give an account of what “common sense” decision-making is, or in other words, to identify the pattern that emerges when interpreters use this term to explain a given decision, and its articulation with normative ideals presented.

The interview transcripts were analysed using a thematic analysis approach (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013; Willig, 2013). The thematic analysis adopted an inductive-deductive approach (Willig, 2013), meaning that a pre-set template was used to organise the data initially, but unforeseen themes were also allowed to emerge from the analysis. Coding categories were searched and related to the main concepts considered in the research questions: normative messages and “common sense”. The identification of meaningful themes was guided by the research questions, but not exclusively, given that the semi-structured interviews allowed for the presentation of other relevant pieces of information which, subsequently, were considered in the construct of an explanatory framework of the data collected. The final result is the generation of insights that present at least a partial answer to the research questions.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1. Introduction

Throughout the interviews, the concept of “common sense” was articulated in relation to other notions. In the interviews conducted, the idea of “common sense” was presented in most of the cases in contrast to the participants’ perception of the normative ideals. Firstly, the perceptions of normative messages are presented. Then, an explanation is offered of the ideas linked to the notion of “common sense” and their interaction with normative messages. Afterwards, how “common-sense” decision-making is articulated in practice is described. Finally, the perception of “common sense” as a justification device is presented.

### 4.2. Perception of the normative messages

During the interviews, two main types of normative materials were mentioned and discussed by the participants: code of ethics and role metaphors, although references to other normative events such as training discourses were also made. The participants’ ideas, beliefs and understanding of these concepts are presented below:

#### 4.2.1. Code of ethics

The codes of ethics were mentioned in the stimuli presented during the interview (see section 3.4 *Interview script* and Appendix 2 *Interview script*). Participants presented different views on its nature during their narratives.

#### **Nature of the code of ethics: flexible versus prescriptive**

When interpreters talked about the code, they referred to it in a variety of ways. The different descriptions can be presented as opposite ends on a continuum: from a flexible guideline that provides advice in a general manner to practitioners at one end, to a rigid and prescriptive document that indicates a set of behaviours to be applied in a consistent and strict manner in every interpreted mediated event at the other. This tension has been categorised for the purpose

of this study as “flexibility versus prescriptiveness”. In the following section, a description of the two opposite ends of the continuum is presented, with explanations of their differing characteristics.

For those adopting the flexible approach, the code of ethics was described as a set of guidelines that provides guidance in the daily work of practitioners. It provides support and indications for professionals to be followed and taken into consideration. In this connection, it was perceived as a positive document, a tool to be used by the profession to solve problematic situations.

*The code of ethics is there to support us, to guide us, and tell us how we should work*<sup>9</sup>. (Participant 1)

Sometimes the positive nature of the documents was presented in contrast to negative metaphors. Interpreters related how some professionals think of the code as an “anvil” or an “evil”, and then clarified they did not share that understanding. Two of the interpreters used these metaphors in order to negate them and reaffirm their positive perspective on the code. At this flexible end of the continuum, the code serves to facilitate interpreters’ decision-making process, not to draw it out.

*The deontological code is not an evil that is there to make your life hard. The deontological code is a tool that allows us to solve problems, right? It is a tool that sets patterns because, indeed, I do not make shoes, I do not make windows, I am dealing with people*<sup>10</sup>. (Participant 8)

At the other end of the continuum, the code was regarded as a prescriptive document. The code was perceived as a rigid set of rules that must be applied in every occasion and without exceptions. Some of the adjectives used are “inflexible” and “square”, and it was mentioned that the document lacks nuances

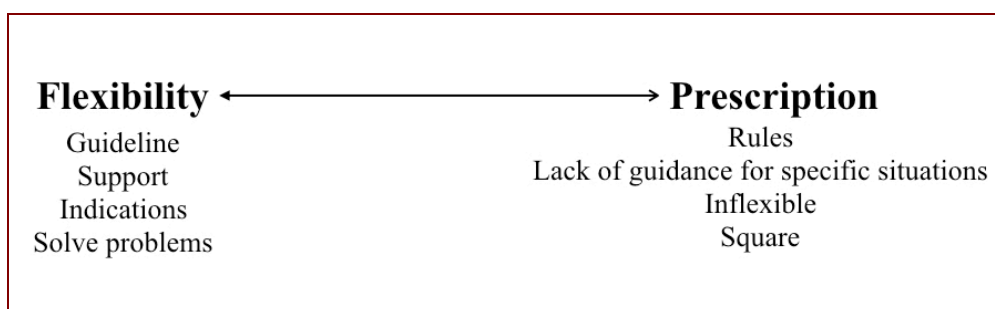
<sup>9</sup> “El código ético está ahí para servirnos de apoyo y de guía para ayudarnos y decirnos cómo tenemos que trabajar”

<sup>10</sup> “El código deontológico no es un ser maligno que está ahí para hacerte la puñeta, el código deontológico es un instrumento, gracias al cual nosotros podemos resolver, ¿Vale? (...) es un instrumento gracias al cual yo tengo marcadas mis pautas, porque, efectivamente no hago zapatos, no estoy fabricando ventanas, estoy tratando con personas”

and lacks guidance on how to apply the rules to specific contexts. In this regard, two of the interpreters compare it to a law.

*Those factors are not analysed in the code of ethics. I would say it is inflexible, ok? Then, when we train interpreters the code is a source of dialogue, in a similar way to the Constitution. In the Constitution it says we all have a right to housing, but that is not real. That is just talk- it does not work. With the code of ethics, the same thing happens.*<sup>11</sup>(Participant 2)

In Figure 1, a representation of the perception of the code of ethics continuum is presented:



**Figure 1: Code of ethics perception continuum**

When considering both the flexible and prescriptive perspectives, it should be noted that none of the participants' position along this continuum was at either of the two extremes, although half of them leaned toward one of the perspectives and the other half to the opposite. Some of them, although tending toward the flexible and positive end, identified the lack of guidance on specific situations as a potential flaw of the code.

*In general terms [the code articles] are patterns that serve as a guideline. Logically, they do not explain what you have to do in every situation (...). It is true that maybe it should be developed further, but I think it is about*

<sup>11</sup> "Esos factores no se analizan en ningún código ético. Es poco flexible, vamos, diría yo. ¿Vale? Aunque luego realmente cuando nosotros formamos a intérpretes, el código ético es una fuente de diálogo ,pero igual que la Constitución. En la Constitución también dice que todos tenemos derecho a vivienda y no está, es una forma de dialogar y esto... no funciona. Pues igual que el código ético"

*patterns that you have in your head in order to carry out your work.*<sup>12</sup>  
(Participant 3)

### **Talking about the code: tenets**

The Spanish code of ethics has seven articles (see Appendix 1). In their narratives, interpreters referred spontaneously to some of the code's tenets in order to illustrate the key points of the document. Most of the interpreters referred to the fidelity tenet at some point in their arguments. This might be biased by the stimulus presented to them, in which the fidelity tenet was at stake, and might have triggered their mention of this tenet during the interview.

*We have a deontological code that rules our behaviour (...) we have to interpret faithfully, confidentially, everything that is said, not omitting information, etc.*<sup>13</sup> (Participant 1)

In addition to the fidelity tenet, only two out of the seven code tenets were explicitly mentioned by some of the interpreters. These two tenets are confidentiality (mentioned by four) and neutrality (mentioned by three of them). In most cases, they referred to these tenets, as well as fidelity, as the core tenets of the code. No mentions were made of any other code tenet, including the "flexible attitude" mentioned under article number five.

*There are two key points: confidentiality and neutrality. Yes, this is really what we have in the code of ethics (...) those points have to rule your way of interpreting*<sup>14</sup>. (Participant 2)

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<sup>12</sup> "Pero en líneas generales son unas pautas que te sirven de guía. Lógicamente no te explican en todas las situaciones qué es lo que tienes que hacer (...) Sí es verdad que a lo mejor habría que desarrollarlo un poco más, pero creo que es unas pautas que tú las tienes que tener en la cabeza siempre para poder desempeñar tu trabajo."

<sup>13</sup> "nosotros tenemos un código deontológico que es el que rige nuestra forma de actuar. (...) tenemos que interpretar de forma fiel, confidencial, todo lo que se diga, no omitir información, etc"

<sup>14</sup> "Son dos puntos duros, confidencialidad y neutralidad. Que sí, que realmente es lo que tenemos en el código ético, realmente muchas veces lo que tenemos que tener en cuenta es que esos puntos tienen que imperar en tu forma de interpretar"

These references to some code tenets are the only explicit references found in the interviews to ethical principles taken into consideration when articulating the content of the code of ethics.

#### **4.2.2. Role metaphors**

In addition to references to the code, during the interviews it was common practice for the interpreters to spontaneously use metaphors to illustrate their understanding about the prevailing normative model (in the interview there were no stimuli containing references to role metaphors). Metaphors serve to convey in a simple manner for both service users and interpreters the complex task an interpreter carries out (Roy, 1993). However, over the years role metaphors have become a behavioural guideline for interpreters (Dean, 2015). The metaphors mentioned during the interviews can be classified according to the three different articulations they present in relation to the interpreter's involvement (or lack of it) in relation to other issues other than the transfer of messages when carrying out their job: the "pure" conduit, the conduit challenged, and the mediator. The different uses of the metaphors are described below.

##### **The "pure" conduit**

The conduit metaphor presents interpreters as professionals who ought "to be detached from any other linguistic or social problem and are to relay the messages back and forth" (Roy, 1993, p.142). The conduit metaphor implies interpreters are uninvolved unless there is a problem with the transfer of the message. During the interviews, the legitimised conduit metaphors used by interpreters to present the normative ideal acquired three different forms: the "communication bridge", the "transmission channel", and the "information channel", although no relevant differences in meaning have been identified between these three presentations. These metaphors were used in a descriptive manner in order to portray the perceived normative role of the interpreter, explaining what is expected from her/him. Sometimes the use of these metaphors was preceded or followed by descriptive behavioural examples of what was meant with the metaphor:

*You are a communication bridge, so you have to say it the way they are saying it (...)*<sup>15</sup>(Participant 4)

*to always bear in mind that you have to be a communication bridge and transmit the message as it is.*<sup>16</sup> (Participant 10)

*I am a mere information transfer; I do not have to soften information just because I know the user. I think that is crossing the line.*<sup>17</sup>(Participant 3)

These metaphors convey the idea of the interpreter as a passive device that serves the aim of transmitting the message in a faithful manner without having any impact on it.

### **The conduit challenged**

As mentioned before, taking into consideration the context and the consequences when making decisions is perceived by some interpreters as challenging the code of ethics. In parallel, in the field of role metaphors, the conduit images used to portray the detached ideal are also challenged by other conduit metaphors. These other metaphors convey the idea of a wider view of the interpreter's task, taking into consideration other factors beyond the mere linguistic translation task.

The bridge, channel, and transfer metaphors convey the idea of an uninvolved interpreter whose task is limited to solely transferring messages. Nevertheless, the data seems to suggest that the passive nature of these metaphors conflicts with the idea of the interpreter as a person who works with people, and the implications that fact has on her/his scope of practice. In this connection, there is another approach to the conduit metaphor used by some interpreters to justify that the "pure" conduit ideal can't be fulfilled in every occasion. The metaphor used to transmit this notion is the machine metaphor, which throughout the in-

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<sup>15</sup> "Eres un puente de comunicación, entonces lo tienes que decir tal cual lo está diciendo, tenemos que ser fieles totalmente al mensaje, un mero canal de transmisión"

<sup>16</sup> "Tener siempre presente que tienes que ser un puente de comunicación y transmitir el mensaje tal cual es"

<sup>17</sup> "Yo estoy de mero transmisor de la información, no tengo por qué paliar una información porque conozco al usuario. Creo que eso es extralimitarme"



interviews had two different presentations: the “machine” and the “robot”. This metaphor was used to reflect some of the challenges to the “pure” conduit model identified, pointing out the impact on the profession of the fact that the work is done in interaction with people:

*You can't take away the empathy or the sensitivity you might have, whatever you want to call it, and be a machine that interprets and that is it and I leave".<sup>18</sup> (Participant 1)*

*In addition to being a communication bridge, you are also in contact with a person who is also providing her points of view, her perspectives, she is not a machine as such.<sup>19</sup> (Participant 4)*

*Maybe I am not the “super-professional” I was during the time in which I only interpreted and I could have been switched on, right? You stop being robotic.<sup>20</sup> (Participant 9)*

As presented above, during their narratives, interpreters used the machine characterisation for both the interpreter her/himself and for the interpreting service users. It is noteworthy that participants found it necessary to point out something that could be seen as obvious: interpreters work with people. The implications of this fact become a salient factor that challenges the perception of the interpreter as a conduit and, therefore, challenges the pure conduit ideal.

The machine and robot metaphors, therefore, present a partial contradiction to the pure conduit ideal presented by the images of the bridge, the channel and the transfer. According to the latter, the interpreter should not have any influence on the outcome of the interpretation, which would be determined exclusively by the service users, not the interpreter her/himself. The machine image conveys a radical view of this idea, which is perceived as not desirable. Inter-

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<sup>18</sup> “No te puedes quitar ese lado de empatía que puedes tener, de sensibilidad, o llámalo como quieras y ser una máquina que interpreta y ya está y me voy”

<sup>19</sup> “Aparte de que tú eres un puente de comunicación, también te estás relacionando con una persona que también está dando sus puntos de vista, sus opiniones, no es una máquina como tal.”

<sup>20</sup> “No soy a lo mejor un hiperprofesional como una época en la que solo interpretas y se me podía haber enchufado, ¿no? Dejas de ser más robótico.”

preters should not aim to act as machines because they are people who interact with people. Empathy towards the people interpreters work with is highlighted by some of the participants as a key element they have to take into consideration. For this reason, some of the interpreters presented an opposition between the interpreter as machine versus the interpreter as a person. An interpreter who is perceived as a person takes into consideration factors in the interpreter mediated event in addition to the complete and faithful translation of the message rendered.

*Because we are not machines, because we are human beings with feelings and emotions (...) if we were simple avatars we would interpret 100 % faithfully the message.*<sup>21</sup> (Participant 9)

Considering both the pure conduit ideal and the clarification made with the machine and robot images, the data seems to suggest that the conduit ideal is understood as the prevailing one in the profession, although taken to its extreme, it is perceived as inefficient and incorrect.

### **The mediator**

In addition to the conduit metaphors presented, there is another metaphor mentioned in a significant number of the interviews: the interpreter as a mediator. There are two interesting issues arising from the data: the definition of what mediation means and the consequent inclusion of the term mediation among the interpreter's responsibilities.

The use of the term mediation is implicitly linked by the majority of those who use it to the idea of context-based decision-making leading to decisions in which interpreters take a clearly active role. On the contrary, there was one participant who argued that this was part of the interpreter's responsibilities, and claimed it should not be called mediation but interpretation, although s/he acknowledged that other colleagues might call it that. In this regard, this interpreter provided a different definition for mediation:

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<sup>21</sup> "Porque no somos máquinas, porque somos seres humanos con sentimientos y con emociones , (...) si fuéramos unos simples avatars interpretaríamos al 100 por 100 fielmente el mensaje"

*A mediator would basically act when the user is not competent with the language, when the user has cultural or social shortcomings, or others... Or when the relation is not natural, when the relation between both parts requires someone to mediate, to guide, to follow up, someone that is part of a multidisciplinary group with a set of objectives and an action plan*<sup>22</sup> (Participant 8)

The rest of the interpreters used the term mediation to describe an involved interpreter who makes decisions that can be classified as “liberal”, meaning behaviours that imply action and go beyond the mere transfer of meaning (the issue of liberal versus conservative decisions will be further analysed in the section 4.4 “Common sense” decision-making). For these interpreters, there is an opposition between the idea of interpreter and the concept of mediator.

*Because if you act as an interpreter-interpreter-interpreter, you interpret what the person is saying, you are a communication bridge, so you have to say it exactly the way s/he is saying it. For me the mediator role prevails more, not only the interpreter one.*<sup>23</sup> (Participant 4)

The mediator concept, when understood this way, serves to challenge the conduit ideal. In this connection, from those that used the term to describe liberal decision-making, two different perspectives are presented. Most of the interpreters acknowledged that in their daily practice they make that kind of decisions. On the contrary, there was one interpreter who believed those behaviours did not fall within the scope of practice of the interpreter’s profession:

*The responsibility about the doctor saying the sex [of the baby] is the doctor’s, not mine. I am there to communicate, I can adapt the message*

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<sup>22</sup> “Un mediador sería, básicamente, cuando el usuario no es competente en la lengua, cuando el usuario tiene otra serie de carencias, culturales, sociales, lo que sea...o cuando la relación no es natural, cuando la relación entre ambas partes requiere de alguien que medie, que guíe, que haga un seguimiento y sobre todo porque forma parte de otro grupo multidisciplinar que forma parte de un programa con unos objetivos y un plan de actuación.”

<sup>23</sup> “Porque si haces como intérprete, intérprete, intérprete, es interpretar lo que te está diciendo la persona, eres un puente de comunicación, entonces lo tienes que decir tal cual lo está diciendo. Pero para mí prevalence más el ámbito mediador no sólo de interpretación.”

*because the user's linguistic level might require adaptation, but I do not have to protect the deaf person. No one protects me when I go to the doctor and I am told what is going on (...). I am a mere information transfer. I do not have to soften a piece of information because I know the user. I think that is crossing the line, I mean, this is a function for which I have not been hired. I am not a mediator, I am an interpreter. So I transmit what I have been told and I do not have that responsibility, I am responsible for getting the message across.*<sup>24</sup> (Participant 3)

From this perspective, the work done by interpreters should be straightforward, aiming to make things seem as if there was no interpreter there, communicating what the deaf person would have heard if s/he was hearing and was not accompanied by an interpreter.

When considering the different uses of role metaphors in the participants' narratives (the "pure" conduit, the conduit challenged, and the mediator), it can be affirmed that among participants there are different coexisting perceptions about what is acceptable in interpreting practice. These descriptive role metaphors seem to have different degrees of legitimacy among practitioners. The data seem to suggest that the "pure" conduit, the narrowest approach to the interpreter's function of the three presented, is the default reference and what stands for right practice. Interpreters tend to mention it although some of them justify why this is not appropriate on every occasion. This can happen in two different forms; either by contrasting it with the extreme version of this metaphor ("I am a communication bridge, not a machine") or by presenting a more flexible metaphor, that of the mediator. In regard to the latter, this "definition" of the interpreter function is in many cases perceived in opposition to the notion of interpreter. This concept implies flexible behaviour, and therefore, contradicts the "pure" conduit idea. Unlike the conduit challenged notion, this is not a refine-

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<sup>24</sup> "Yo la responsabilidad de que el médico diga sexo, es del médico, no es mía. O sea, yo estoy ahí para comunicar, o sea, yo puedo adaptar el mensaje porque el usuario tenga unos niveles lingüísticos que necesiten adaptación, pero yo no tengo que proteger, entre comillas, al sordo. O sea, es decir, a mí nadie me protege cuando voy al médico y me dicen las cosas yo estoy de mero transmisor de la información, no tengo por qué paliar una información porque conozco al usuario. Creo que eso es extralimitarme. O sea, es decir, hacer una función para la que no estoy contratado. No soy un mediador, soy un intérprete. Entonces, transmito lo que me cuentan y no tengo responsabilidad, tengo responsabilidad en que el mensaje llegue bien"

ment of the “pure” conduit, but a different approach to the interpreter’s task, and seems to represent not a normative ideal but rather an “acceptable” practice (although not all the interpreters perceive it that way). In this respect, the data seem to suggest that this different approach has a lower degree of legitimacy as normative model than the one presented by the conduit metaphors.

In Figure 2, the different normative weight of the three metaphors with normative weight present in practitioners’ narratives is illustrated. The different positions of the metaphors describe from top to bottom the different degrees of legitimacy of the metaphors according to the data analysed:

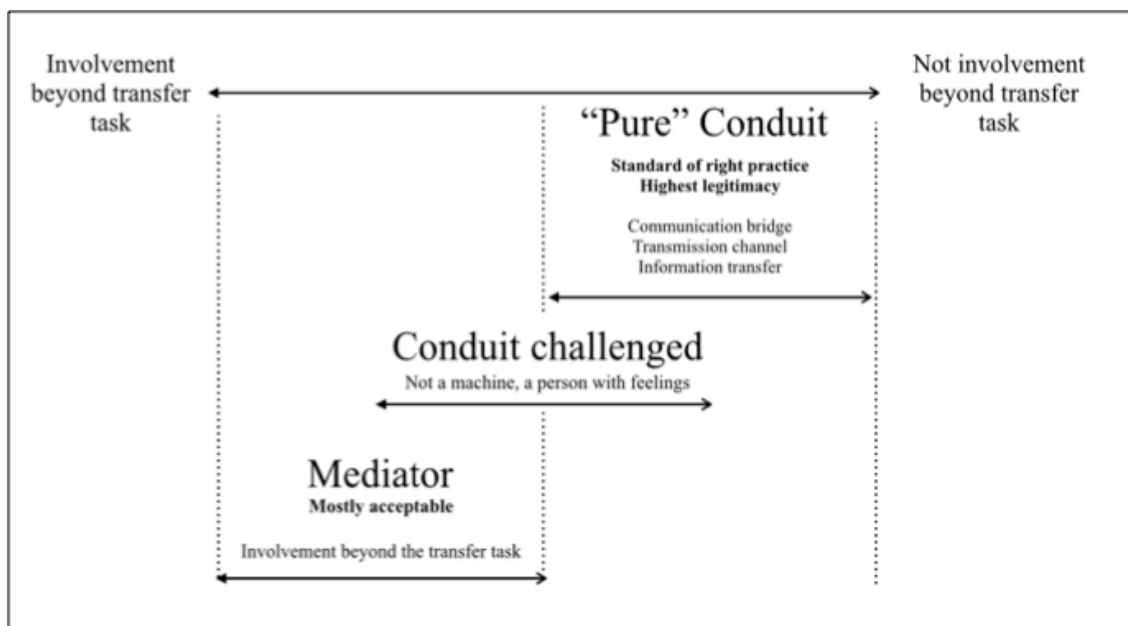


Figure 2: Normative weight of role metaphors

Although participants in their narratives did not explicitly relate the code of ethics to the metaphors they used, they implicitly associated the “pure” conduit metaphor with the ideal of ethical behaviour. In other words, by giving this metaphor the highest legitimacy, they implicitly affirm that the code states that this is the standard of right practice.

### 4.3. Challenges to normative messages

In the previous section the different perceptions about the normative ideals were presented. As shown above, different perceptions about what comprise

the standards of right and acceptable action and how they are articulated through normative material coexist among practitioners. In this section, some of the identified challenges to that ideal are presented, articulated through the use of the expression “common sense”. Firstly, the different ideas expressed about the notion of “application of common sense” are presented. Then, the different approaches to the interaction between “common sense” and the normative ideal are described.

#### 4.3.1. Characterisation of “common sense”

“Common sense” is implicitly and/or explicitly perceived as the consideration of the context and all the factors arising when making decisions, with a view to the consequences of a potential decision:

[Defining “common sense”] *To think about what is going on, what factors are present, what each one of the people present want, and then act. (...) Analyse the situation and, depending on each situation, act.*<sup>25</sup> (Participant 1)

Some of the participants mentioned other terms they use as synonyms of the idea conveyed by “common sense”: to “analyse”, to “use logic” (Participant 1), to “adapt to the environment” or to “try to make the situation as natural as possible” (Participant 5). The issue about what implies “common sense” in practical decision-making will be further analysed under section 4.4 “*Common sense*” *decision-making*. All the participants agreed in different degrees to the use of the expression “common sense” when applied to decisions not matching the “pure” conduit model.

[Referring to the use of the expression “common sense” presented in the interview stimulus] *Once we are professionals and we are already work-*

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<sup>25</sup> “El pensar qué ocurre en esa situación, qué variables hay, qué quiere cada una de las personas que están en esa situación, y actuar. (...) analizar las situaciones, y en función de cada situación, actuar” .

*ing, we do not just [apply] what we have learnt in theory, because what we have learnt is way more restrictive.*<sup>26</sup> (Participant 9)

“Common sense” is perceived as a personal device, rather than a shared one. In this regard, some of the interpreters use the possessive pronoun “my” when referring to “common sense”, pointing to a personal approach to decision-making that is not intended to be shared with other colleagues. Therefore, applying “common sense” involves a personal approach to decision-making that is understood not to be common to the profession as a whole.

*For me, common sense is what I think, is “my” common sense, not the rest of the people’s common sense.*<sup>27</sup> (Participant 6)

Another idea shared by most of the participants is that of “common sense” as something that evolves with time; the more experienced they are in the field, the more effective their “common sense”. To illustrate this idea, study participants tended to present a contrast between novice interpreters or interpreter students doing their final internship and seasoned ones.

*I believe that the new interpreters, the novice ones, in this kind of situation sometimes tend to think, “What should I do? What should I do?” I think that with time and experience, what rules is common sense and thinking, “well, in this situation I do this.”*<sup>28</sup> (Participant 2)

Novice interpreters are portrayed as inflexible followers of the code of ethics, who are not able to take into consideration other factors that may be happening. On the contrary, experienced interpreters are presented as more flexible, which is implicitly identified with well-developed “common sense”. In these descrip-

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<sup>26</sup> “en el momento en el que ya somos profesionales y estamos ejerciendo, no sólo lo que hemos aprendido teóricamente, porque lo que hemos aprendido teóricamente es mucho más restrictivo”

<sup>27</sup> “para mi el sentido común es lo que yo pienso, es mi sentido común, no el sentido común del resto”

<sup>28</sup> “Creo que los interpretes que vienen nuevos, vienen más novatos, sí que hay veces que en esas situaciones tendrían un poco de ‘¿qué hago? ¿qué hago?’ Entonces yo creo que con el tiempo y la experiencia lo que impera es el sentido común y decir “bueno, en esta situación es esto”

tions, being aware and considering the factors that have an impact on the decision-making process is learnt over the years, not in training programmes. In this sense, the content of some of the comments presented by interpreters who are also working as interpreter trainers is remarkable. One of them first acknowledged the multiple factors that impact the decision-making process in interpreting assignments. Then, he compared his approach to interpreting at two different stages: when he was a novice interpreter and nowadays. He realised that when he was just starting out, he used to pay attention solely to linguistic issues and not to other factors that arose, following a strict conduit ideal. However, he acknowledged that in his trainer role now, he encourages students to take a narrow approach to decision-making by referring them to the conduit ideal in a strict manner.

*I believe that sometimes when interpreting I have realised situations or things that might have happened, especially when I started, and I think I have confined myself a lot to a merely linguistic task, meaning interpretation between languages. And I have omitted things because at that moment I could not appreciate or did not see them.*<sup>29</sup> (Participant 9)

*I would not trust my own students (...) their common sense is not yet like mine (...) Because, when training, I am way more restrictive (...) I encourage them to reflect but I try to be a little bit more... I do not know, I imagine I tend to imitate the same process I experienced when I was trained.*<sup>30</sup> (Participant 9)

The notion of “common sense” is identified by some of the interpreters as an intuitive device rather than a rational one. Sometimes they are first aware of

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<sup>29</sup>“Yo creo que hay veces que interpretando he sido consciente de situaciones o cosas que han podido ocurrir, sobre todo al principio, y yo creo que yo me he ceñido mucho a una labor meramente lingüística, es decir, de interpretar entre lenguas. Y he omitido cosas que porque en el momento no las supe valorar, o no vi”

<sup>30</sup> “Yo no me fiaría ni de mis propios alumnos (...) su sentido común todavía no es el mío (...) porque yo mismo, en la formación, me encargo de ser mucho más restrictivo y de decirles “mirad, aunque vais a actuar vosotros en cada situación de una forma más profesional y tal, estas normas las tenemos aquí, yo quiero que las conozcáis bien y yo quiero que esto...” o sea les animo a la reflexión pero intento ser un poquito más... no sé imagino que intento mimetizar el mismo proceso con el que he aprendido yo.”



what “common sense” is telling them to do, and afterwards they remember what the code states in relation to that specific topic.

*For me the first thing is that comes up is common sense, the first thing. But then you have a voice telling you ‘no, no, you have to abide by the code, you are a communication bridge, you have to render the message literally<sup>31</sup> (Participant 4)*

It is noteworthy that only one of the interpreters reflected upon the questionable suitability of the application of the term “common sense” as a tool to guide the decision-making process. Interestingly, this person was the participant who presented the strongest defence of the conduit model as part of the normative ideal and the need to respect it on every occasion, considering that abiding by the code took precedence over the consequences of the decisions made.

*[The expression “common sense”] is of little value. I mean, logically, everyone in our profession uses “common sense”, but I do not agree with the fact that this is what allows me to make decisions<sup>32</sup> (Participant 3)*

#### **4.3.2. “Common sense” versus code of ethics**

As presented above, “common sense” is implicitly and/or explicitly perceived as the consideration of the context when making decisions.

*To apply logic and analyse each situation, what is going on, and to act depending on the situation, the variables present and what would I do. Look, there is no magic formula for interpreting. You can say there is a code, what has to be done, how to follow the code... but then you can't apply an abstract code to a specific situation.<sup>33</sup> (Participant 1)*

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<sup>31</sup>“Lo primero que me sale es el sentido común. Lo primero que me sale. Pero luego por detrás tienes ahí el... llama diciéndote, no no, es que tienes que apelar al código ético, que tú eres un puente de comunicación, tú tienes que dar el mensaje literal”.

<sup>32</sup> “Es un poco de andar por casa, o sea, que lógicamente todos en nuestra profesión utilizamos el sentido común, pero que eso sea lo que me permita a mí tomar decisiones, me chirría un poco”

<sup>33</sup> “A ser un poco lógicos, y analizar cada situación, lo que ocurre y actuar dependiendo de la situación, de qué variables están en esa situación y qué haría . A ver, tú puedes no hay una

“Empathy” and “sensitivity” are some of the components of the interpreters’ behaviour that participants mentioned as coming into play when applying “common sense”. Consideration of both the interpreter and the consumers as people, with their personal aims, needs and feelings was identified as one of the reasons behind the decisions made when applying “common sense”. In this regard, some of the participants made an explicit mention of achieving a good result for all the parties involved as an objective when applying “common sense”, which can be understood to refer to “effectiveness”, although this term was not used:

*My common sense, to act in a given way in a given situation so the consequences or the situation itself develops the best possible way for all the parts. That is my common sense, so my performance is the best for all parts involved in this situation.*<sup>34</sup> (Participant 1)

There are two main approaches to how “common sense” interacts with the normative ideal presented by the code. These two perspectives match the two ends of the continuum mentioned under section 4.2.1 *Code of ethics*. For those who understand the code as a prescriptive document, taking into consideration the context when making decisions creates a conflict. On the contrary, for those who see the code as a flexible guideline, there is no such conflict. It is noteworthy that half of the participants tended toward one of the approaches and the other half had the opposite opinion.

### **A conflict between “common sense” and the normative ideal**

For those interpreters who understand the application of the code in a prescriptive manner, the application of “common sense” or making decisions based on the context was perceived as being at odds with the code of ethics. According to their view, there is no space within the code to make adjustments according

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formula magistral a la hora de interpretar, tú puedes decir, sí hay un código ético, qué es lo que hay que hacer, cómo seguir este código ético, pero luego no puedes aplicar un código ético en abstracto a una situación como tal.”

<sup>34</sup> “Mi sentido común, hacer o actuar de una forma determinada en una situación para que las consecuencias o la situación en sí se desarrolle lo mejor posible para todas las partes. Ese es mi sentido común. El que la actuación sea lo mejor para todas las partes que están en esa situación”

to the specific situation and the factors arising there. They perceived adapting to the situation as non-compliant with the ideas presented in the code. Therefore, by being flexible in the application of the code and deviating from the “pure” conduit model, they understood that they were not abiding by the code.

*In that moment you are going to think about common sense and you are going to act according to what your mind tells you. Obviously you should never skip the code for any reason, but sometimes you have to.*<sup>35</sup> (Participant 2)

Within this group there were two different perspectives: those who openly acknowledged that sometimes they “have to skip the code” and those who affirmed they always strictly follow the code and that abiding by the code should be prioritised over “applying common sense”. It is noteworthy that, although some of the participants expressed some doubts as to the appropriateness of some of the decisions they labelled as “common sense”, no one explicitly considered that those decisions were unethical. Therefore, although they considered they were deviating from the norm, they believed their decisions were acceptable.

*Of course, if you think of the pure ethical code I should not have done this under any circumstance, of course, but I understand that this [what s/he did] is common sense.*<sup>36</sup> (Participant 5)

### **No conflict between “common sense” and the normative message: the interpreter makes decisions**

In contrast with the views presented above, the other half of the pool did not see a conflict between “applying common sense” and abiding by the code. In this perspective, “common sense” implies applying the general principles presented in the code to specific contexts considering the factors present there and, in doing so, using the code in a flexible manner. In this sense, this adaption to

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<sup>35</sup> “En ese momento tú vas a pensar en el sentido común y vas a hacer según lo que te mande un poco tu cabeza. Evidentemente nunca saltarse porque sí el código ético, pero hay veces que sí”

<sup>36</sup> “Pero claro, eso no tendría que hacerlo de ninguna de las maneras, claro, evidentemente, como código ético puro, pero que vamos, entiendo que es de sentido común”

specific situations does not involve a conflict. Rather, it is guided by professional experience. The core idea is that of the interpreter as an active agent who has to reflect, analyse all the factors, and make decisions accordingly. This was not regarded as conflictive in regards to following the normative message.

*By “common sense”, we all mean the same thing, right? To make a decision taking into consideration all the factors, not to let yourself be ruled by the code of ethics as if it was a heavy stone and say “we just have to interpret, the rest is not my business.”<sup>37</sup> (Participant 9)*

Only one of the interpreters sharing this perspective suggested that in cases where the interpreter doubts whether to adopt more flexibility or not, s/he should tend not to do it and strictly follow the code instead, given that the code would back the interpreter up if there is a conflict.

*[code of ethics] is the base that is always there and you have to use when you think... well, you should never skip it, you should never break it, you should never x, y, z... But it is the base, the support you always have there. When you do not know what to do, the ethical code tells you<sup>38</sup> (Participant 5)*

In Figure 3, the above described interactions between “common sense” and normative messages are illustrated:

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<sup>37</sup> “Que todos entendemos eso por ‘sentido común’, ¿no? Tomar una decision teniendo en cuenta todos los factores, no dejarte llevar (...) por el código ético como si fuse una losa y decir “no, tenemos que interpretar, pim pan, allá se apañen”

<sup>38</sup> “Es esa base que está ahí, que la tienes que utilizar cuando creas... bueno, nunca te la saltes, nunca la rompas, nunca tal, pero es la base, el apoyo que tú siempre tienes ahí. Cuando no sepas qué hacer, el código ético te lo marca”



#### 4.4.1. Problem setting

The situations presented occurred in different types of settings (educational, legal, medical, business, etc.). The situations described by the interpreters can be classified in two broad types of conflict. There is one group of interpreters, composed of six of the interpreters, that is faced with a situation in which the interpreter, as a participant in the event, for several reasons acquires more visibility and, therefore, the illusion of invisibility is broken. This situation happens in a variety of ways. For example, Participant 6 referred to a situation in which the teacher asked her to stop interpreting when there was a strong argument going on between the deaf student and a hearing one.

*In the classroom, the hearing user has told off the deaf student. The deaf student had previously said he would like to know everything that is said, and the interpreter interprets this situation. What is the consequence? That the deaf students answers back, right? And then there is trouble. Then, the teacher comes and tells you [the interpreter] “stop interpreting”.*<sup>39</sup> (Participant 6)

In the second group, composed of four of the participants, the conflict had to do with a difficulty found in the communication flow between the hearing and the deaf user. It included cases in which the deaf user was not accessing or understanding some information provided by the hearing user (and interpreted by the practitioner). It also includes a case in which the deaf user can't provide the information requested due to the way the information was being provided.

*Going with a deaf old person, retirement paperwork issues... all the papers s/he had to bring, all the different issues... and then I realised that the deaf person was not getting any of the information provided*<sup>40</sup> [by the public officer] (Participant 5)

<sup>39</sup> “En aula el alumno oyente delante del profesor increpa al alumno sordo. El alumno sordo de antemano ha avisado de que el quiere saberlo absolutamente todo y el intérprete interpreta esta situación. ¿Qué produce esto? Que el alumno sordo devuelva... ¿no? Y se monte follón. Entonces llega el profe, y el profe te dice, ‘deja de interpretarlo’”

<sup>40</sup> “ir con una persona sorda mayor, el tema de la jubilación, todos los papeles que tenía que llevar allí, todo lo quetal, pues mira, cuando ya veía que a la persona sorda le estaban entrando números y nombres por todos los lados”

#### 4.4.2. Decisions

The decisions made by the interpreters in regard to the controls to be used in the situations described have been classified within the Liberal-Conservative continuum (Dean & Pollard, 2005, 2013). Liberal decisions are understood to mean those that are more “active, creative or assertive” (Dean & Pollard, 2005, p.270) while the conservative decisions are those that can be presented as more “reserved, cautious” (ibid.).

In the decisions labelled by the participants as “common sense” responses, a strong tendency can be observed towards presenting liberal decisions (eight out of ten). Some of the actions considered under the liberal approach are, for example, adding information to the source message, having direct interaction with one of the service users (beyond asking for clarification of an utterance not understood), withholding relevant information rendered by the hearing user when the deaf user was not looking and interpreting it later, or continuing to interpret once the hearing user (teacher in the classroom) had asked the interpreter to stop doing so.

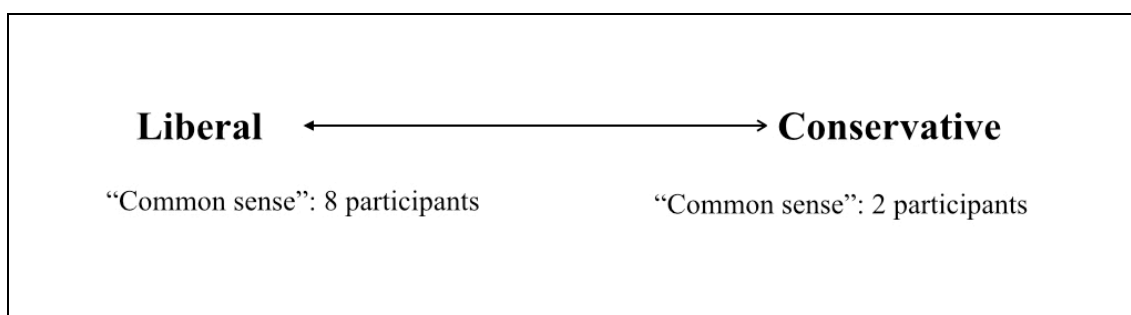


Figure 4: “Common sense” decision-making in the liberal-conservative decisions continuum

The decisions grouped under the “liberal” label present a distinct degree of action, although all of them imply setting aside the “passive” ideal. For example, Participant 3 described a medical appointment, in which the deaf customer was an old woman. The doctor asked her for the name of the medication she was

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taking. When the interpreter rendered the message, the woman did not know the answer.

*And then before the doctor continued, I asked her what colour was the medication box, I asked her for a description so she could give as many details as possible to the doctor<sup>41</sup> (Participant 3)*

In this case the interpreter made a liberal decision because she proactively searched for a way so that the woman could give some information about the medication to the doctor, instead of adopting a more conservative attitude and just rendering the deaf and hearing participants' utterances.

As mentioned above, there were two participants who identified the use of common sense with a conservative approach. The behaviours presented under this category are avoiding engaging in an assignment's preparatory meeting with service users and avoiding interpreting derogatory comments made by a teacher to the interpreter in relation to a deaf student.

*We [interpreters] usually meet before [the trial] with the deaf (...) contact the deaf person and her/his own way of signing (...) I do not know, it is reassuring, especially when there is a complicated trial ahead. But in this case my common sense tells me [not to meet] with any of them<sup>42</sup> (Participant 2)*

#### **4.4.3. Justifications**

Interpreters explained and justified the decisions they made under the label "common sense" referring to a number of reasons. As mentioned above, "common sense" is generally related to taking into consideration the context when making decisions. Participants' responses can be classified in two broad types

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<sup>41</sup>“y entonces antes de que el médico siguiera, yo le pregunté de qué color era la caja, que me la describiese un poco para darle los más datos posibles al médico”

<sup>42</sup>“tenemos la costumbre de quedar antes con el sordo (...) contactar con el sordo y su forma de signar (...) No sé, nos da más tranquilidad, sobre todo a la hora de tener un juicio tan complicado. Pero en este caso el sentido común me dice que ni con uno ni con otro.”



of justifications according to what is being considered when making the decision: potential consequences and effectiveness. These two categories are further described below:

Looking at the potential consequences of both taking a given action, and not taking that action, is cited by six of the interpreters as one of the reasons behind their decisions. These potential consequences are of different types: the potential consequences that not taking that action would have for the deaf user, the potential impact for the interpreter at either a personal or professional level, or the potential consequences that taking a different action would have on the interpreter-user relationship.

*But if you give in to the rest [stop interpreting when the teacher asks the interpreter to do so] you are failing the [deaf] student in relation to trust, which is key to causing the tie [interpreter-user] to break down. Deaf students depend a lot on the interpreter they have in front of them. If there is not full trust, academic achievements are affected<sup>43</sup> (Participant 6)*

The other broad type of justification given by the interpreters is that of being effective, meaning solving the situation in an appropriate manner. All the participants, in either an implicit or an explicit manner, referred to this idea of solving the situation, although different approaches to what is considered effective were found. There was a diversity of arguments used to justify that if the interpreter had acted in a different way, the situation would not have been solved. Some of the reasons given are that the interpreter had more information than the other two parties, that the message would not get through otherwise, or that the interpreter perceived her/himself as part of the setting team and, therefore, being effective meant taking into consideration one's responsibilities as part of that team. Continuing with the situation presented above by Participant 3 in which the old deaf woman could not remember the name of her medication, the interpreter justified her action in the following way:

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<sup>43</sup>“pero si cedes en lo demás, le estás fallando al alumno en el grado de confianza, que es determinante para que la relación se rompa también. Los alumnos sordos dependen muchísimo del intérprete que tienen delante, si la confianza no es ciega, los resultados académicos se resienten siempre.”

*I believe that on that occasion I did use common sense because I thought “this is going nowhere, the doctor does not have enough information to know this woman, I do have that information, so let’s see”.*<sup>44</sup>  
(Participant 3)

Interestingly, during the interview this interpreter had defended a very prescriptive approach to the normative messages, arguing against those who show some flexibility in regard to the “pure” conduit model. Then, when asked to give an example of “common sense”, this example was given; the participant stated that it was contradictory to what s/he had said before. Then, the participant justified it by citing a required “change of role”, due to the deaf user’s personal characteristics:

*In this situation I believe that it also changed the role a bit, meaning that I did not interpret literally, but I did mediate a bit more. The doctor’s question was “what medication are you taking?”, so it is not that I decided to make up whatever came to my mind, but this was a situation the doctor was not solving because the woman was not going to tell him the name of the medication.*<sup>45</sup> (Participant 3)

It is noteworthy that the term “role” was mentioned only two times in the ten interviews. In this case, it seems to suggest a justification for a behaviour that, based on the discourse previously presented by the same interpreter, would be not permitted.

Interestingly, very few explicit mentions were made of normative ideals, and the apparent inconsistency between decisions labelled as “common sense” and these normative ideas presented throughout the interviews. In the few cases in

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<sup>44</sup> “ahí sí creo que utilicé el sentido común porque pensé ‘esto no lleva a ninguna parte, el médico no tiene datos suficientes para conocer un poco a esta señora, yo sí los tengo, pues vamos a ver’...”

<sup>45</sup> “ahí yo creo que también el rol cambió un poco, en el sentido de que no interpreté el sentido literal, sino que ya medié un poco más. Sí es verdad que la pregunta partió del médico de ‘¿qué medicación tomas?’, con lo cual no es que a mí se me ocurriera que vamos a decirle a este señor lo que yo crea que tienes que decirle, sino como era una situación que el médico no estaba solventando, porque la señora no le iba a decir el nombre del medicamento”

which a mention was made, a contradiction was acknowledged. In this regard, no major concerns were expressed about this fact and participants did not feel the need to provide further explanations in this respect.

*But of course, if taking into consideration the pure ethical code I should not have done this under any circumstances, but I understand that this is common sense.*<sup>46</sup> (Participant 5)

#### **4.5. “Common sense” as a justification device**

It is noticeable that two participants spontaneously made a reflection in regards to why interpreters might use the expression “apply common sense” when making specific kinds of decisions. Interestingly, one of them was in the group that saw a potential conflict between “common sense” and the code of ethics and the other one did not perceive any conflict. In their views, there is a type of behaviour that interpreters frequently adopt that is not legitimised by the profession. However, experienced interpreters personally think these decisions are appropriate in a given context. Therefore, they needed to justify that what they decided to do was right. The way they found to justify these decisions was to label them as: “common sense”.

*One thing that was complicated for me, and I will never know if it was right or wrong, but it was a decision I made, and I think I internally justified it by calling on common sense.*<sup>47</sup> (Participant 9)

In this regard one of the interpreters made the following comment after being presented with some statements made by interpreters in the previous study on fidelity (Calle- Alberdi, 2015b) in which they argued they would not directly interpret the sex of the baby but rather choose another option:

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<sup>46</sup> “Pero claro, eso no tendría que hacerlo de ninguna de las maneras, claro, evidentemente, como código ético puro, pero que vamos, entiendo que es de sentido común”

<sup>47</sup> “Una cosa que para mí fue complicada, que nunca sabré si está bien hecha o tal, pero que fue una decisión que tomé y que yo creo que la justifiqué en mi fuero interno gracias al sentido común”

*Because she is very responsible and very committed [the interpreter in the pilot study] then she reflects and makes that decision. And, as she knows that that decision is not politically correct, or not the most appropriate politically, she justifies it as “common sense”. And that annoys me, because that indicates that for this professional there is a conflict I would not have experienced.*<sup>48</sup> (Participant 8)

This statement had its counterpart in the affirmation of one of the interpreters who believed there is a conflict between making decisions considering the context and consequences, and the normative message:

*You always have in your mind “I am not being strictly professional because I am not transmitting the message exactly as it has been rendered”. But I am doing the work well because in the end I am solving the situation, yes, the “common sense” the colleague refers to...*<sup>49</sup> (Participant 10)

According to this statement, the concept of “professional” is identified with the “pure” conduit model, not with “solving the situation”, which is another way of referring to taking into consideration the consequences of a given decision. Therefore, what the interpreter considered the most effective decision was also regarded by the same interpreter as not compliant with the normative message.

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

The participants in the study referred to two main types of normative messages when talking about the ethical content of the profession: the ethical code and the role metaphors.

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<sup>48</sup> “Precisamente porque es muy responsable y porque está comprometida, pues entonces tiene que reflexionar y tomar esa decisión. Y, como sabe que esa decisión no es políticamente correcta o no es políticamente la más adecuada, entonces, lo justifica con el sentido común. Eso es lo que me da rabia, porque realmente eso indica que esa profesional pues ha habido un conflicto que yo no hubiese vivido”

<sup>49</sup> “Tú siempre tienes en la cabeza no estoy siendo estrictamente profesional, porque no estoy transmitiendo el mensaje tal cuales, pero estoy haciendo el trabajo bien, porque al fin y al cabo estoy resolviendo la situación, claro, el sentido común que dice la compañera”

The ethical code is the document participants identified as presenting the profession's standards of right action, although interpreters presented a diversity of perspectives in regards to its degree of flexibility.

The role metaphors are descriptive devices that interpreters use to depict different kinds of behaviours with different degrees of involvement of the interpreter beyond the mere transfer of messages back and forth. The one that describes the more involved behaviour, the "pure" conduit, is implicitly identified with the content of the code of ethics. When the behaviour described under this metaphor is not met, some interpreters understand they have skipped the code. The other metaphors used, especially the mediator one, describe more flexible behaviours that take into consideration other demands happening in the given situation, especially those related to interaction among participants of the interpreted event. However, this notion does not have the same legitimacy as a normative message as the "pure" conduit one, which is the default reference that interpreters use when referring to the normative ideal. The mediator metaphor is conceived instead by some interpreters (but not all) as an "acceptable" practice, depending on the context.

"Common sense" was a notion used in the interpreters' narratives to identify a series of behaviours they adopt on some occasions that encompass actions that go beyond the mere transfer of messages between event participants. The decisions described as "common sense" tend to be liberal decisions, involving action and creativity. In this connection, these decisions come up against the "pure" conduit ideal interpreters tend to refer to when presenting the default ethical ideal. This gap between what interpreters say they should do and what they themselves say they actually do describes a contradiction between these two realities, what Dean and Pollard have called "rhetoric versus de facto" (2005).

"Common sense" comprises the consideration of the factors present in the context, or demands, when making a decision. However, some participants identified it with an intuitive approach, rather than a rational one. It is also described

as a personal device that is developed on the job (in opposition to the training programmes) and evolves with time.

What interpreters described under the behaviours classified as “common sense” has many similarities to what they described under the description of the mediator metaphor. In this respect, it seems that metaphors that challenge the “pure” conduit ideal tend to act as a device that describe and therefore, provide some legitimacy, to what the interpreters are doing in their daily work. The vocabulary and the approach participants took when talking about ethical constructs in the profession is a deontological one that tends to talk about rules. The articulation of values in ethical decision-making was absent from their narratives.

According to the data, it can be suggested that the application of the term “common sense” to a given decision aims to justify some behaviours than do not fully meet the normative ideal, i.e., the “pure” conduit model.

## 5. Discussion

In this study, the ethical constructs used by Spanish Sign Language interpreters when making decisions have been analysed. More specifically, the articulation of normative messages (code of ethics and role metaphors) in decisions labelled by participants as “common sense” decisions were examined. The research questions are as follows:

- How do Spanish Sign Language interpreters understand the profession’s normative messages?
- What are the reasoning patterns that emerge when Spanish Sign Language interpreters use the term “common sense” as an explanation for their decisions?

The analysis of the data provides an initial overview of how experienced Spanish Sign Language interpreters understand the profession’s normative ethical constructs and articulate them in their daily practice. The code of ethics was acknowledged by participants as the document that endorses the standards of right practice of the profession (Hill, 2004; Hoza, 2003). However, half of the participants in the study affirmed that it is not a document that is easy to apply and, therefore, they justified that it was not uncommon to skip it. Fritsch-Rudser (1986) had already warned against those who expected the code to be effortlessly applied. In this respect, in the literature it has been pointed out that codes of ethics have different layers (Fritsch-Rudser, 1986; Hoza, 2003), and ethical values are the underpinning layer to which practitioners should refer when making decisions (Fritsch-Rudser, 1986; Hale, 2007; Hoza, 2003). To understand how to articulate ethical decisions in relation to the code values is not an intuitive action, but rather a skill that requires specific training (Hale, 2007).

Therefore it can be hypothesised that the difficulties faced by Spanish interpreters when applying the code may be related to the content of the current training programme available. All the participants of this study had been initially certified by associations of the deaf, and eight of them had subsequently qualified with the official vocational training available afterwards. In addition, four of them had

experience as trainers. It is remarkable that half of them, including trainers, openly indicated something similar to what Participant 2 expressed this way: “Obviously you should never skip the code for any reason, but sometimes you have to”. This idea contradicts the notion of the ethical code as the document that regulates the profession (Harrington & Turner, 2002), presents ethical standards (Hoza, 2003), and represents an agreement among professionals, service users and general public (Cokely, 2000; Leneham & Napier, 2003). However, this contradiction did not seem to raise major concerns among study participants.

Although this study did not aim to analyse in depth the Spanish code of ethics, its deontological approach was pointed out, supported by the few references to ethics in the official curriculum (*Real Decreto 1266/1997, de 24 de julio, por el que se establece el currículo del ciclo formativo de grado superior correspondiente al título de Técnico superior en Interpretación de la Lengua de Signos*, 1997) and existing training materials (De los Santos Rodríguez & Lara Burgos, 2004). According to the data, this deontological approach seems to be identified by practitioners implicitly with the broader notion of “ethical reasoning”.

Throughout the interviews, the code principles explicitly mentioned by the interpreters were the tenets called “the Holy Trinity of Confidentiality, Impartiality and Accuracy” (Leneham & Napier 2003, p.92), although Spanish interpreters used the terms neutrality instead of impartiality, and fidelity instead of accuracy. However, the Spanish code has seven articles, and presents other notions among its articles, such as “Shall maintain a flexible attitude on interpreting and guide-interpreting assignments”(FILSE, 2002). However, references only to the above mentioned tenets can be found in their narratives. No other values consciously articulated in their reasoning, such as values of the setting the interpreter is working in, seemed to acquire the same normative weight as these three tenets .

The code is not the only normative material to which interpreters refer. Role metaphors acquire a normative weight in their narratives (Dean, 2015), although



in their discourse the term “role” is hardly used. This fact differs from the portrait other authors have made of practitioners’ discourse in English speaking countries, where the expression “step out of the role” is very common (Llewellyn-Jones & Lee, 2014; Tate & Turner, 2002).

Participants used the role metaphors in a spontaneous manner to both describe and legitimise their actions (Dean, 2015). In this respect, the example of Participant 3 is interesting. This interpreter’s narrative presented a coherently articulated deontological approach to ethics. However, when s/he described a situation in which her/his behaviour contradicts her/his ethical discourse, s/he explained that the situation, due to the characteristics of the deaf customer, required a “role change” from the default “pure” conduit to mediator. According to Llewellyn-Jones & Lee (2014), this could be due to a change in the role space of the interpreter due to the specific characteristics of the situation. However, this descriptive analysis lacks normative ethical constructs. By arguing this way, Participant 3 justified a behaviour (adding information not rendered by the hearing user so the deaf user can provide the information the hearing user is looking for) that otherwise would be forbidden by the ethical approach s/he is apparently abiding by. Although the practitioner spontaneously acknowledged a contradiction between both ideas, her/his justification served her/him to perceive this reasoning as ethically acceptable.

Among the role metaphors presented in their narratives (“pure” conduit, the conduit challenged, and the mediator), the data seems to suggest a hierarchy of legitimacy among them. The “pure” conduit refers to understanding the work carried out by interpreters as the mere transfer of messages between service users without further involvement of the interpreters (Roy, 1993). Hsieh (2008), citing other sources, had referred to it as the “default” role, and the data analysed seem to confirm this idea. According to the data, participants tend to understand the behaviour conveyed by the conduit metaphor as inscribed in the code, although the code does not make reference to the concept of role, nor does it convey all the ideas clustered under the conduit model. In this respect, Fritsch-Rudser (1986) affirmed that practitioners sometimes wrongly identified

ideas with the code that in reality are not part of it. This seems to be the case of Spanish interpreters.

Participants presented some contradictory ideas in regards to the conduit metaphors. The conduit images were the default reference (“I am a communication bridge”, “I am a conduit”), but it conflicted with their experience in the field (Angelelli, 2004; Llewellyn-Jones & Lee, 2014; Tate & Turner, 2002). The notion of invisibility of the interpreter (Angelelli, 2004), meaning lack of agency, has been challenged by different studies in the field that have given a detailed description and analysis of the work of community interpreters (Angelelli, 2004; Metzger, 1999; Roy, 2000; Wadensjö, 1998).

As mentioned above, participants sometimes deviated from the understood normative message. However, no major concerns were expressed in this regard, implicitly presenting these deviations as acceptable due to the circumstances. These deviations were legitimised by the use of role metaphors. The expression “We have to be (...) mere transfer channels, but we are not machines” (Participant 1) sum up a shared idea: the “pure” conduit ideal is not achievable because interpreters are people and work with people and, therefore, other issues come into play, such as for example empathy and sensitivity.

As mentioned in the literature review, Dean & Pollard (2013, 2005) define practice professions as those in which interaction with other people has a key role in the professional activity. To have empathy and sensitivity towards the service users is not part of the default normative message, and that seems problematic. It might be hypothesized that these notions can be associated by interpreters to the “helper model”, the role model associated with the stage previous to the professionalization of interpreters. According to the Demand-Control Schema (Dean & Pollard, 2013), empathy can be considered one of the controls or resources a practitioner can have that might provide her/him with an adequate response to a given demand, especially interpersonal ones. However, participants in the study did not articulate the notions of empathy and sensitivity this way. According to their narratives, they just described what they feel and, in line with their vast experiences in the field, they gave it legitimacy. By admitting the

existence of empathy and sensitivity, interpreters challenged the “pure” conduit metaphor but still kept referring to it.

Another way of legitimising behaviours that do not fully meet the “pure” conduit is by the use of the mediator metaphor. However, the data seem to suggest that this metaphor has less normative weight than the conduit one, and actually some participants saw it in opposition to the notion of interpreter. In this regard, some of them associated “interpretation” with the values conveyed by the conduit model, and excluded the notions associated with “mediation” (i.e. having some involvement beyond the transfer of meaning) from the definition of “interpretation”. While the conduit model was generally associated with standards of right action, the mediator model was associated by most of them with acceptable practice, but not the ideal one.

“Common sense” is a notion that has been presented throughout history in opposition to different constructs. For example, Millstone (2012) argued that “common sense” has been presented in contrast to formalistic thinking, meaning logical reasoning searching for the truth through valid reasoning. It has also been that “common sense” refers to a description of what works in a given situation, in opposition to theory or science, which relate to explanation (Daly, 2014). Nevertheless, professionals should not rely exclusively on their “gut feeling” when making decisions, because the impact of their decisions on other people’s lives requires a refined (and ethical) approach (Dean, 2015). Looking at “what works” in a given situation is very important, but this reasoning should be articulated from an ethical perspective beyond the pragmatism of “solving a situation”.

According to the data, “common sense” is an expression that tends to be used by interpreters to describe decisions that can be classified as liberal, meaning that they imply action (Dean & Pollard, 2005, 2013). These decisions, on many occasions, challenge the normative ideal participants refer to in their narratives. The data analysed in this study suggest that interpreters have some confusion in regard to what their scope of practice is. What they actually do in their daily practice does not meet the ideas portrayed in their discourse about standards of

right practice. Liberal decisions tend to be associated to the notion of “mediator”, and this notion, in turn, refers to a behaviour that is not rhetorically approved by the profession, although some voices in the study claim it should be. This situation is what Dean and Pollard (2005) have referred to as the gap between “rhetoric versus de facto”, meaning the differences between what interpreters say is the right thing to do, and what they do in practice. Dean and Pollard warned of the risks of such situations, potentially leading to unexamined and unethical practice (ibid., p.264).

The analysed data show a pattern of identification of the notion of “common sense” as a personal device rather than a shared one. In this sense, it does fit with the notion of collective agreement that the code of ethics endorses for the profession (Cokely, 2000; Hoza, 2003; Leneham & Napier, 2003). In addition, “common sense” type of thinking does not require any specific kind of training (Millstone, 2012). However, understanding the values behind the codes of ethics and reflectively thinking about them requires it (Fritsch-Rudser, 1986; Hale, 2007).

According to the participants’ affirmations, novice interpreters are depicted as strict followers of the code that do not have the abilities to take into consideration the context when making decisions. Study participants affirmed that this is a skill that is learnt on the job and after years of experience. This affirmation has some important implications for service users: should novice interpreters’ ethical judgments not be trusted? Although professional experience will always play a relevant role in the development of expertise, scholars in the field of professional ethics have affirmed that ethical decision-making should be addressed by interpreting training programmes (Bebeau, 2002; Dean, 2015; Kitchener, 1986). It is noteworthy that one of the participants, an interpreter trainer her/himself-although s/he acknowledged that over the years s/he had learnt to take into consideration the myriad of factors that have impact on the interpreting work-affirmed that as a trainer s/he adopted a narrower approach, implying a deontological approach. It can be hypothesised that those in charge of training new interpreters do indeed imitate the way they were trained in the past, reproducing an schema that is proving to be insufficient to understand the profession.

Descriptive devices have had a decisive role in the development of ethics in the interpreting profession. Role metaphors describe behaviours and give them a name. Over time, these descriptive devices acquire normative weight (Dean, 2015; Roy, 1993). In parallel, “common sense” is associated in the literature with description rather than explanation (Daly, 2014, citing Lonergan). By labelling some decisions as “common sense”, these decisions are not further explored in terms of the reasons that lead to making that decision (Fritsch-Rudser, 1986). On the contrary, those descriptions are explained solely in relation to a given context and, by doing so, are justified. In this sense, both role metaphors and “common sense” serve to the same purpose: to justify behaviours without appealing to professional ethical constructs.

The interpreting profession has traditionally adopted normative approaches to ethics that have shown to be problematic (Cokely, 2000; Dean, 2014; Llewellyn-Jones & Lee, 2014; Tate & Turner, 2002). In this connection, Dean has said that “normative ethics do not have to be prescriptive or be imposed *a priori*” (2015). Some scholars in the field have suggested the profession should turn towards a teleological approach to normative ethics (Cokely, 2000; Dean & Pollard, 2013; Dean, 2015).

Teleology consists of considering the context when making decisions with a view to the consequences of those decisions. In this regard, “common sense” shares with teleology the notion of situated decision-making, considering the context in the articulation of decisions instead of pre-set rules. However, teleology also implies articulating values in this decision-making process. Ethical values in conflict in a given situation should be balanced against each other (Hundert, 1987). To do so, the values that come into play should first be acknowledged by the profession, such as the goals of the setting the interpreter is working in (Dean & Pollard, 2013). In this regard, the data suggest that Spanish Sign Language interpreters also fail to acknowledge the values they articulate in their decision-making.

The decisions practitioners are making in their daily practice respond, although mainly in an intuitive manner, to values that are being prioritised in the situations they describe. Cokely affirmed that, "Given the potential consequences of our choices and resultant actions, it is reasonable to expect that we constantly re-examine those values, principles, and beliefs which underscore and shape the decisions we make and the actions we undertake" (2000, p.27). In this study, the values that were articulated by interpreters in their decisions remain unexamined, and should be further explored.

As mentioned above, in Spain, the deontological approach to ethics seems to have tinged the notion of "ethical reasoning". Interpreters talk about normative ethics in a deontological way. However, they talk about their current practice in a manner that is closer to teleology: taking into consideration the context and the potential consequences of their actions. In other words, when they consciously talk about ethics, they talk about rules. When they talk about their actions (and implicitly talk about ethics), they explain the cognitive processes behind their decisions and justify their behaviours. They no longer talk about rules, but instead describe their decisions made in a given context and, by explaining the salient factors, they justify the decision. What interpreters cannot justify with ethical constructs is labelled (and justified) as "common sense".

### **5.1. Limitations of the study**

This study is initial exploratory research into the ethical constructs of Spanish Sign Language interpreters, and its analysis has not aimed to explain their behaviours but rather describe participants' conscious cognitive processes in regards to normative ideals and decision-making. In this respect, the meta-ethical nature of this study did not aim to describe what interpreters do in real practice, but rather how they think and talk about the decisions they make. For gaining insights on behavioural description, a different methodology would be more appropriate, such as on-site fieldwork or experiments with mock assignments.

The limited sample size of participants does not allow the results to be generalised beyond the scope of this study. The number of participants was limited to allow for an in-depth qualitative analysis of their narratives.

The individual interviews allowed participants to express ideas that they considered were not fully legitimized by the profession. However, the stimuli presented to the participants in the interviews might have triggered reflections about the code of ethics that, otherwise, would have not appeared in their spontaneous narratives about professional decisions. In this sense it might be interesting to explore their narratives either without mentioning specific normative materials in the interview questions or with specific mention of other normative materials and events, such as trainers' discourses.

Three participants in this study had already participated in the previous study conducted and discussed one of the scenarios presented under question 1. This might have had an impact on their responses in this study, as they might have been shorter and less spontaneous given that they had already reflected about this issue with the researcher and some issues mentioned in the first study might have been taken for granted in this second one.

## **5.2. Recommendations**

The review of the literature and the analysis of the interviews provide some recommendations for the profession, especially for the upcoming sign language interpreting training to be established soon at university level in Spain.

Professional ethical decision-making is an issue that needs to be addressed in training programmes (Cottone & Claus, 2000;. Dean, 2015; Kitchener, 1986). To reflectively think about the code and values behind it is not an intuitive issue; rather, it requires an academic background (Hale, 2007). Moreover, a professional endeavour requires practitioners to reflectively think, because the code cannot be applied effortlessly to any situation (Fritsch-Rudser, 1986). To talk about standards of right action, interpreters need to adopt ethical constructs (Dean, 2015). The current training available seems not to have provided practitioners with the required tools to further analyse the code and the ethical constructs behind it. The deontological approach to interpreting is so far the only legitimised ethical normative discourse among interpreters, and it is contradicted by current practice, leaving room for unregulated, unexamined and unethical

practice (Dean and Pollard, 2005). It is recommendable for the bodies in charge of the implementation of interpreting training programmes to take into consideration when designing the new programme to be launched at university level the above mentioned issues. In addition, the interpreters' associations could also take into consideration the conclusions from this study, considering the gap between "rhetoric" and "de facto" practice to promote a fruitful debate about the profession, and consider among other things "either the Code needs to say something different, or the way that interpreters are enculturated into their professional understanding of that Code needs to change" (Tate & Turner, 2002, p.59)

In addition to the above, some recommendations for future research can be made. The analysis of the participants' narratives did not examine the values articulated in their current decisions. The data analysis suggests that interpreters do not exclusively articulate the values they acknowledge in the code of ethics. By looking at their decisions, other values are recognised. In this respect, further research could be conducted on the values that come into play when interpreters make decisions in their daily practice. This analysis could further inform the profession about what is the current practice of experienced interpreters and, in this regard, present a descriptive analysis based on ethical constructs of what are the current (unexamined) values of the profession. In this connection, descriptive ethics would inform normative ethics and a fruitful dialogue could be established between these two strands of professional ethics.

In regard to the values of the profession, the influence of the practitioners' specific culture has not been addressed in this study. Hoza (2003) citing the work of Page (1993) reported on different expectations for interpreters depending on different cultures. Given that most of the literature available is from English speaking countries, it would be recommendable to promote research in different parts of the world and compare if the professional values differ and if so, how, depending on the region.

Lastly, when considering the values of the profession, the view of service users should also be addressed. To explore the users' understanding of the interpret-



ing professional values could inform the professional debate and also provide material for further mutual understanding between professionals and service users.

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## 7. Appendices

### 7.1. Appendix 1: Deontological code of sign language interpreters and guide-interpreters of Spain

#### Introduction

The present deontological code elaborated and approved by FILSE (Spanish Federation of Sign Language Interpreters) and its member associations, sets the correct guiding principles for sign language interpreters and guide-interpreters working in Spain.

Sign language interpreters and/or guide-interpreters include all professionals who hold the corresponding qualification obtained via formal education received either from organizations of sign language and guide-interpreters and/or deaf and deafblind people's associations, or through other professional qualifications.

Compliance with the code is obligatory for all professionals practicing in Spain. The Internal Regulations that oversee possible infringements to the Deontological Code are applied to this group of professionals.

#### Deontological code

A sign language interpreter/guide-interpreter must always act in a professional manner and must assume his/her responsibilities accordingly. Therefore, throughout her/his work, he/she must adhere to the following:

1. An interpreter must maintain an impartial attitude at all times. Her/his actions and behaviour must reflect the neutrality that corresponds to her/his work, avoiding behaviours that imply custody, advice, or control. For the same reason, she/he shall not assume functions that are not directly related to the profession. An interpreter must ensure the necessary professional distance.

- An interpreter shall maintain a neutral and acceptable personal presence for each situation that leaves no room for the extraction of connotations.
2. An interpreter is sworn to respect the confidentiality of the activity at hand. This principle may be violated should the interpreter be required as a witness or defendant in a legal situation.
  3. An interpreter must interpret the totality of what is expressed so that the rendition accurately conveys the original message. She/he shall facilitate the most complete form of communication and adjust to each situation according to the communicative ability of the service user.
  4. An interpreter must be aware of her/his professional capabilities and, therefore, shall not accept assignments that she/he considers to be beyond her/his ability. In case she/he cannot withdrawal from the assignment, she/he shall inform the service users and the contractor involved in the situation in advance.
  5. An interpreter must respect the established professional ethics and, therefore:
    - Shall maintain a flexible attitude on interpreting and guide-interpreting assignments.
    - Shall respect the service users' dignity as well as ensure his/her own.
    - Shall avoid gaining personal advantage or benefits and shall not express his/her personal and/or academic merits.
    - May refuse an assignment if it goes against her/his personal set of values.
  6. She/he shall take part in continuous professional development.
  7. While carrying out interpretation services, the interpreter shall:
    - Inform of the conditions necessary for the adequate accomplishment of the assignment and, if necessary, of the profession in general.

- Follow the established service fees, inform the contractor of these fees in advance, and avoid unfair competition with other professionals.
- Do his/her best to provide a substitute if it becomes justifiably impossible to take on an assignment.
- Prepare the assignment adequately.
- Reserve a reasonable time for its completion.
- Respect punctuality norms.
- Have the right to know the identity of her/his colleagues and the identity of the service users whenever possible.
- Safeguard the honour and prestige of the profession, always maintaining a critical, respectful and supportive attitude towards her/his colleagues.

The present deontological code is regulated in a practical sense by its corresponding set of Internal Regulations.

Madrid, 26<sup>th</sup> October 2002



## 7.2. Appendix 2: Interview script

1. I am going to present you a couple of scenarios that you may face in your daily practice. I would like to ask you to answer three questions in relation to each of the scenarios:

- What elements are relevant and must be taken into account when making a decision in this specific situation?
- What would you do?
- How do you justify your decision?

Scenario 1: You are on an interpreting assignment with a Deaf pregnant woman who is going for an ultrasound. You know that she does not want to know the sex of her baby, but the gynaecologist suddenly says 'the baby girl is fine'.

Scenario 2: You interpret on a daily basis with 2<sup>nd</sup> ESO<sup>50</sup> grade students. There is a hearing student that frequently teases and insults a deaf student. Yesterday, the deaf student asked you not to interpret the insults from the hearing student because that makes him suffer. Today at a given moment the teacher momentarily left the classroom while the students were doing their homework. At that moment, at the back of the classroom, the hearing student made a derogatory remark in relation to the deaf student. The deaf student is focused on his homework and he has not realised there has been any comment.

2. In a study I made prior to this research with SLI with the same working experience (10 years of experience), I presented the study participants with the first scenario of question 1. Several participants proposed as one possibility to solve this situation not to interpret the sex of the baby straight away but to tell the deaf woman "the doctor just said the sex. Do you want to know it?" Some of them said that in order to make that decision they "applied common sense". Now I will read you some of their statements in this regard:

*then the doctor say it[sex of the baby] without realising? I would say "ey, he has said this. Do you want to know it? But of course, I agree, you are*

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<sup>50</sup>Students around 12-13 years old

*a communication bridge, you do not have to assess information, you have to interpret it, but sometimes is that... common sense... if she has clarified, meaning, she has told you "I do not want to know it"...*

*In principle I believe that common sense is the most important thing. In that situation I would try not to interpret it*

*Answer: That is very typical of us, common sense*

*Question: By "us" you mean the interpreter profession?*

*Answer: Yes, even very typical of us training interpreters. I always refer to common sense*

- What do you think these statements mean?
- What do you think about these statements? Do you agree with what they express?

3. In the same study during the interviews some of the participants made some comments about the relation between the code of ethics and "applying common sense":

*In some situations common sense is, as long as you do not hit the ethical code, the one that is going to guide you in the assignments. We have established some patterns and certain things but, of course, in moments of tension, in critical and complicated moments, common sense rules*

*In situations such as this one, I think it is common sense; I do not want to hurt a couple because I am going to tell them the sex of the baby. But in principle, I would act sensitively, although the code states I should interpret everything*

*Answer: the code of ethics would say I should interpret it*

*Question: the code of ethics, but what about reality?*

*Answer: the reality is that I would not. Reality shows that this is clearly an important thing for the future of... I do not know... Interpreters are always*

*faced with issues in relation to the code of ethics and some of us solve them in a given manner and some others do it in a different manner. But in principle I believe that common sense is the most important thing*

- What do you think about the relation these interpreters present between the code of ethics and common sense? Do you agree?
4. Can you think of an example of your professional life in which when presented with a situation in which you had to make a decision, you can say you applied "common sense"?
5. The RAE<sup>51</sup> dictionary defines "common sense" as "The way of thinking and proceeding that the majority of people would follow"
- Does this definition reflect what you think of as common sense?
  - In relation to the use of common sense at professional level as an interpreter, do you think this definition is complete or that something should be added/changed...?

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<sup>51</sup> Royal Academy of Spanish Language.

### **7.3. Appendix 3: Interviews transcripts**

See CD attached with the complete ten interviews transcripts in Spanish