

## TEXT & TALK

### Cover sheet

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## **Recontextualisation and advocacy in the translation zone**

### **Abstract**

This paper reports an element of a team linguistic ethnography which investigated the ways people communicate with each other in the changing, dynamic environments of superdiverse cities in the UK. The particular example examined here is that of a ‘translation zone’ between an advice worker and her Chinese clients in a community centre with a remit to support Chinese people in the city. In the interaction the advice worker, herself a migrant from China, translates relevant aspects of the complex, bureaucratic welfare benefits system, deploying interlingual, intralingual, and intersemiotic translation. More than this, however, the advice worker engages in recontextualisation, co-constructing and re-shaping the client’s narrative so that it meets the criteria of the government welfare benefits office. Recontextualisation is a consistent feature of the discourse practice of the advice worker as she seeks to support her clients. We propose that it may well be a salient feature of interactional encounters as people seek help and advocacy to negotiate complex bureaucratic systems.

**Keywords:** Recontextualisation; translation; advocacy; narrative; advice centre; translation zone

## **1. Introduction**

In superdiverse cities translators and interpreters are crucial agents of civic coexistence, as migrants negotiate access to rights, resources, and social spaces. Often untrained and non-professional translators and interpreters are essential figures on the urban landscape. As intermediaries, shifters, connecting agents, and dispatchers, they are ‘the anonymous heroes of communication’ (Simon 2012: 3), making social space more habitable. Translation reveals the immensity of the resources that a city can draw on to manage unpredictable and uncertain futures (Cronin & Simon 2014).

But at the same time, translations are rarely neutral. Translators and interpreters are, like all social agents, positioned ethically, morally, and politically. The agency of the translator is a crucial dimension of the process of translation. Whether politically overt or not, translators’ choices are influenced by their affiliations, values, and world views (Tymoczko 2014). The process of translation may include the deployment of recontextualisation strategies, through which translators may select, endorse, and/or reperspectivise some parts and aspects of a source text, edit these parts in new ways and combinations, subdue some elements, and highlight others. In contexts in which migrants are seeking support to gain access to rights, resources, or social spaces, these strategies often have a political and/or ethical character.

In this paper we report an example from an ethnographic study in which an advice and advocacy worker in a Chinese community centre in a UK city negotiates complex bureaucratic systems for her Chinese clients, translating and advocating on their behalf. Through analysis of an interaction between the advice and advocacy worker and a group of clients, we will argue that recontextualisation in the translation process is deployed as a

means of advocacy, and as such is not a neutral act. Before moving to analysis and discussion of the interaction in the advice centre, we will situate the discussion theoretically, with reference to recontextualisation, legal discourse, and translation.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Recontextualisation**

Communicative acts are connected across space and time. One of the ways in which they are connected is through ‘recontextualisation’. Bernstein (2000: 33) suggested that the recontextualisation process ‘selectively appropriates, relocates, refocuses and relates other discourses to constitute its own order’. When parts of texts or discourses are relocated through recontextualisation, they are often subject to change. Recontextualisation involves shifts of meaning and new perspectives, the accentuation of some semantic aspects and the backgrounding or deletion of others. Recontextualised in this way, the source text is replaced by a proliferation of differences in form, meaning, and effect (Venuti 2012). A special issue of TEXT, edited by Linell and Sarangi (1998), examines discourse across boundaries between discourse communities. Sarangi (1998) provides a comprehensive overview of interpretations of recontextualization. Linell (1998) argues that recontextualisation is fundamental to all communication. In their study of organizational discourses and practices, Iedema and Wodak (1999) propose that recontextualization is the very crux of power.

The recontextualisation of discourse does not refer merely to the repetition of the same argument in a new context. Rather, recontextualisation involves transformation (Blackledge 2008). Krzyżanowski (2016) reminds us that Bernstein (1990) viewed recontextualisation

not as fixed or static, or as an end-point, but rather as a social and discursive process, which moves from the primary contextualization of the text, through selective recontextualisation, to the reproduction of the text. In the process of recontextualisation elements of discourse are filtered in ways that affect how events are evaluated, explained, and legitimised, and also the order in which they are represented. The empirical example we will discuss is from our ethnographic observations in an advice and advocacy service in a Chinese community centre in a UK city, where legal and quasi-legal discourse was commonplace. We will therefore briefly consider recontextualisation and legal discourse.

## **2.2. Recontextualisation and legal discourse**

Legal and quasi-legal contexts where lay people tell or retell their stories provide opportunities for those stories to be evaluated, refocused, summarised, amended, rejected, or judged as unacceptable (Eades 2010). Recontextualisation in cross-examination can involve subtle substitution of lexical items, or contests over the choice of lexical items. Written recontextualisation of a witness statement may introduce subtle changes from the spoken version. In the common law litigation process, legal–lay communication can be seen in terms of fluid and ever-changing forms travelling through time and space (Rock, Heffer, and Conley 2013). Rock (2013) examines a police interview, and demonstrates how recontextualization operates as a witness’s talk is transformed into evidence. Johnson (2013) analyses how police interview texts travel from the interview room to the audio-recording to the court, and how the interview texts are institutionally evaluated and transformed. Harding and Ralarala (2017) analyse transcripts of police interviews conducted in isiXhosa in South Africa, and notes the omission or de-selection of key narrative elements and story

aspects. These omissions skewed the focus of the statements so that potential witnesses, and the degree and nature of the violence reported, were lost from the record.

In legal and quasi-legal systems, lawyers and other practitioners exert power through access to linguistic and interactional resources in relation to defendants and witnesses. They can push storytelling in certain directions by instructing witnesses and defendants on how to produce stories before the trial, and by managing the telling of narratives through question-answer formats, interruptions and reformulations (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012).

Narratives may be co-constructed by police officers and witnesses, lawyers and defendants, advisers and clients. Lawyers interviewing their clients may steer them to produce a particular kind of story, one which focuses on specific incidents rather than experiences, and on rational and relevant aspects rather than emotional aspects of their story (Eades 2010). Recontextualization is therefore a significant process in the configuration of the genre and scope of narratives, and an important tool in the transformation of everyday narratives into other kinds of texts (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012).

### **2.3. Recontextualisation and Translation**

Jakobson (1959/2012) distinguished between ‘intralingual translation’, ‘intersemiotic translation’, and ‘interlingual translation’. Intralingual translation, or rewording, is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language. In other words, an intralingual translation of a word uses either another, more or less synonymous, word or resorts to a circumlocution. Interlingual translation, or translation proper, is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language. Intersemiotic translation or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of nonverbal sign systems. Iedema (2001)

proposes that intersemiotic translation includes translations that occur between different semiotic systems and their materialities. These translations are intersemiotic insofar as one semiotics comes to stand for or represent another. Acknowledging that the distinctions between these categories of translation are far from distinct, and frequently overlap, Boase-Beier (2011: 5) acknowledges that ‘it is not really clear what translation involves’. Attention to everyday interactions in the superdiverse city can shed light on what translation involves in practice.

Schouten, Ross, Zendedel & Meeuwesen (2012) note that non-professional interpreting and translation is part of the everyday life of millions of people across the world. Very often hidden from view, the role of the non-professional interpreter/translator has become increasingly evident in recent times. Pérez-González & Susam-Saraeva (2012) point out that non-professional translation and interpreting are as widely established and diversified as professional translation and interpreting. Non-professionals usually do not undergo professional training in translation. This enhances their sense of initiative, authority and agency in reformulating the material to favour particular outcomes. Boéri (2012) suggests that a non-professional interpreter’s perception of ‘the right thing to do’ under specific circumstances will be contingent upon a number of factors, including their personal biography, social history, and values.

Translation is far from being a neutral process. Schäffner (2010) points out the importance of ideology in translation contexts. Textual transformations performed by professionals acting as translators can be viewed as gatekeeping functions, as texts are altered in the process of translation. Reorganising the structure of the original text, changing sentence structures, and adding contextualizing information are functions which reflect the importance of ideology in

the translational recontextualisation process. Translations can reflect, contribute to, and contest ideological debates and conflicts. They are rarely straightforward and faithful reproductions of their source texts. Translations are often, rather, ‘a deliberate and conscious act of selection, assemblage, structuration, and fabrication – and even, in some cases, falsification’ (Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002: xxi). Translation incorporates recontextualisation processes across linguistic, cultural, and ideological boundaries (Schäffner 2010), and as such, translation is an integral part of the politics of migration, and of the social life of superdiverse cities. Translators’ decision-making has consequences for people who seek access to rights and resources. Emphasis on translators’ choices and decision-making is therefore a crucial step in exploring the role of the translator as advocate in migration and post-migration contexts. In what follows we consider recontextualisation in the translation zone of a Chinese advice and advocacy centre in a city in the UK.

### **3. Data and methods**

The study reported here was conducted as part of a wider research project, ‘Translation and Translanguaging. Investigating Linguistic and Cultural Transformations in Superdiverse Wards in Four UK Cities’<sup>i</sup>. The project was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council as a Large Grant in the Translating Cultures theme. The aim of the project was to gain an advanced understanding of the ways in which people communicate when they come into contact in changing, complex cities, and to analyse their communicative practices in terms of wider social processes, ideologies, and relations of power. We conducted ethnographic investigation in four cities in the UK. We selected sixteen sites where people from diverse linguistic backgrounds come into contact. This paper refers to one of those sites:

an advice and advocacy service providing support to the local Chinese community with welfare, immigration, citizenship, and other quasi-legal issues. One of the advice and advocacy workers, Li Na (not her real name), agreed to be key participant in the research, and to collaborate in observation and audio-recording of her professional practice. Li Na had migrated to the UK from southern China twenty years earlier. Rachel Hu, a researcher in the team, conducted ethnographic observations of Li Na at work in the advice and advocacy service. Adrian Blackledge visited the centre on six occasions. The Principal Investigator of the overall research project, Angela Creese, also visited on several occasions, and observed Li Na at work.

The interaction examined in this paper takes place in the advice and advocacy service. The service is situated in a Chinese community centre which also offers wellbeing activities, a table tennis club, a dance group, Taichi classes, calligraphy classes, and language classes. Appointments with the advice and advocacy worker are for half an hour or multiples thereof, and a nominal fee is payable. The clients are normally Mandarin or Cantonese speakers. Many of them have limited English proficiency. The advice and advocacy worker, Li Na, is proficient in Cantonese, Mandarin, and English. The meeting between the client and the advisor invariably involves narration of the client's story about their circumstances and needs. The client's narrative is normally translated, or interpreted, by Li Na, as she re-tells it to a government official on the telephone, or enters a version of it into the computer. Typically, Li Na summarises, or rewords the narrative, checking the account, and requesting further information, as she renarrates the story in English on the telephone, or as she types in English at the computer.

In Translation Studies, ‘translation’ usually refers to the written mode, whereas ‘interpreting’ refers to the oral mode. Inghilleri (2017: 31) points out that translators play a key role in contexts of migration by ‘facilitating access to cultural texts and local forms of knowledge written or spoken in another language’. In the study reported here interactions frequently involved both written and spoken translation and interpretation. The distinction between interpreting and translation was therefore not as clear-cut as it may be in some other contexts.

We refer to translation and interpreting interchangeably to describe Li Na’s complex linguistic practice in the advice and advocacy service. Li Na was not a professional interpreter, and nor was she trained to give legal advice. She joined the community centre as an office worker, then moved to the position of care worker in a day centre for the elderly in the same organization. She told us that she was moved to the role of advice and advocacy worker by her line manager because she was ‘good with people’. Initially reluctant to make the move, she had been in this role for eleven years when she participated in the research.

Many of Li Na’s clients came to the centre to ask for advice because their English proficiency was not sufficient to enable them to navigate the complex bureaucratic systems with which they were faced. She was therefore a *de facto* interpreter/translator. The research team observed and audio-recorded Li Na’s advice sessions two days a week for eleven weeks, recording her observations as field notes. In all, 79 advice and advocacy sessions were observed and audio-recorded. Li Na explained the project to each of her clients, and asked them to sign a consent form giving permission for observation, audio-recording, and subsequent public use of linguistic material. Li Na’s clients came for support with multiple and diverse issues, some complex, others less so. Many were concerned with claims for welfare benefits. Others were related to passport applications, insurance claims, school admissions, letters from doctors, electricity bills, council tax bills, and so on. Many clients

required support with more than one issue, as their challenges were complex, and overlapped.

During and beyond the data collection period, Rachel transcribed the audio-recorded material. She listened to all of the interactional audio-recordings, and selected sections for transcription. She then sent the transcripts to Adrian Blackledge and Angela Creese, together with a reference to the audio file, which was commonly available to them. The research team listened separately to the audio recording while annotating the transcript. They held weekly meetings to discuss the transcripts. This activity continued for some months, as the transcripts ran to some hundreds of pages of text. During and after this period Blackledge wrote thematic summaries of the annotated transcripts, and these formed the basis of a subsequent report. This report (Blackledge, Creese, & Hu 2018), 77,830 words in length, became a valuable resource in the development of subsequent research papers.

## **4. Analysis**

### **4.1. Recontextualisation and advocacy in the translation zone**

In the example that follows Li Na engages with a family of three after they arrive in her office for an appointment. The family requests help in dealing with the benefits claim of R, a man in his early forties who has a diagnosis of schizophrenia. His parents attend the appointment with him. R's main spoken language is English. His parents' main spoken language is Cantonese. Rachel wrote the following field note as they arrived:

R, a very tall and bulky man, walks in. He is followed by his mum and dad, both tall and slim. They look as though they are in their seventies. Mum and Dad sit in the chairs in front of Li Na, next to each other, while R sits in a chair at the side of her

desk, his head bowed. R's mother tells Li Na in Cantonese that this is their first time at the centre, and they need her help, as R has lost his Employment and Support Allowance. R keeps silent while his mother is talking, and looks out of the window throughout the interview.

The meeting lasts for more than 90 minutes, and is observed and audio-recorded by Rachel. In the selected transcripts that follow, three speakers are represented: Li Na (L), R's mother (M), and a benefits officer (B). The benefits officer is not physically present at the interview, but speaks to Li Na on the telephone. Li Na speaks to R's parents in Cantonese, and to R and B in English.

In the opening part of the interaction Li Na tries to establish the nature of the clients' problem. R's mother says that he has been diagnosed with schizophrenia, and that he had been in receipt of a government welfare benefit, Income Support, due to his condition. However, following an assessment, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has determined that he is fit to work, so he is no longer entitled to the benefit. The assessment was based on a work capability assessment interview with a health professional appointed by the DWP, while R's parents were away in Hong Kong. Employment Support Allowance (ESA) had recently replaced Incapacity Benefit. The criteria for ESA were more stringent than for Incapacity Benefit, meaning that fewer people were able to successfully claim the benefit. R's mother gives Li Na a copy of the DWP assessment. Li Na says that R may have been denied the benefit because in his assessment interview he played down the severity of his condition. In *Example 1* R's mother refers to the outcome of the assessment.

*Example 1*

1 M 有冇問題點解食藥成日食咗幾十年呀?

[ if he has no problem why has he been on medication for so many years? ]

2 L 有冇打人呀?

[ does he hit anyone? ]

3 M 煙

[ he's angry ]

4 L 煙憎?

[ is he angry? ]

5 M 係啦,大大聲,講粗口

[ yes shouting, swearing ]

6 L 如果呢度我睇返我都唔會俾錢嘅因為你咩問題都冇嗎

[ looking at this I would not have agreed to pay you, because you say you have no problem ]

7 M 有冇問題即係叫佢申請 Job Seeker 囉

[ they say he has no problem, so they tell him to claim Job Seeker ]

8 L 我同你打個電話試吓 看吓有冇得補救,如果佢話對唔住真係超過一個月

咁我哋申請左失業金先 過咗六個月重新再填呢份表格,好唔好?

[ I'll try to phone and see if we can fix it. If they say sorry it has been over a month, then we will claim Job Seeker's Allowance, and fill in the form after six months. Is that all right? ]

The questions Li Na asks will determine the type of narrative she elicits. This is not a neutral process. Recognising a need for more evidence if she is to apply for a reconsideration of R's claim, Li Na asks R's mother questions (in Cantonese): 'does he hit anyone?' (turn 2), 'is he angry?' (turn 3). Li Na is an advocate for her client, and seeks evidence that will leave R best placed before the DWP decision maker. Through Li Na's questioning the context relevant to interpreting the speech event is established (Wortham and Reyes 2015). Contextualisation involves an active process of negotiation in which the participants reflexively examine discourse as it is emerging, embedding assessment of its structure and significance in the speech itself (Bauman and Briggs 1990). Li Na makes just such an assessment, telling her client that the evidence presented by R in his assessment interview was unconvincing, 'looking at this I would not have agreed to pay you, because you say you have no problem' (turn 6). Li Na makes a telephone call to the DWP office to check that it is possible to appeal against the work capability assessment. At the beginning of *Example 2* she turns to speak to M. The benefits officer is still on the telephone.

*Example 2*

9        L        (( to M: )) 佢話可能會重新考慮 交畀佢同事去睇下 我哋係唔同意佢呢度

嘅答案頭先你話佢好炆憎 大概係幾耐一次啊? [ They said they can

reconsider if we do not agree with the answer. You just said he gets angry.

How often? ]

10.      M        瞪你點樣同佢講野囉 日日都可以炆架 大聲同佢講,咁佢就會炆啦 有時唔  
        噃佢心水嘅都會炆

[ It depends on how you talk to him. Almost every day. If you speak loud, or say something he doesn't like, he will get angry ]

11. L 佢炆會做乜嘢?

[ Then what does he do? ]

12. M 講粗口啦,打頭啦,大大聲鬧囉

[Swears, hits his head, shouts ]

13. L 佢呢個最大嘅問題係乜嘢?

[ What's his biggest problem? ]

14. M 係發脾氣啦,有時吐下口水囉

[ Bad temper, spitting ]

15. L 冇傷人? 打人?

[ Does he hurt people? Is he violent? ]

16. M 打人就好耐以前打過我 有時窗都打爛 佢唔鍾意都會 send 哟 text 倆佢家姐,好 nasty 嘅啲 text 有少少恐嚇性咁囉 我個女啲仔啊 下次嚟我會殺你 咁啲恐嚇性囉

[ He hit me a long time ago, he breaks windows when he's not feeling right.

He sent a text to his sister, a nasty text threatening to kill her children when they come ]

17. L 佢冇嘢做就亂搞呢啲嘢?

[ He has nothing to do so he does this? ]

18. M 佢冇嘢做返嚟喺屋企睇吓電視 坐得唔係好安定

[ He sits around the house watching TV, but he can't keep still ]

19. L 坐唔定架?

[ He moves around? ]

20 M 行上行落咁囉

[ He walks up and down ]

21 L ((to B:)) Yea mm mm, right, while you were typing, maybe you already heard, I was speaking to the parents, and the mum was giving me back the answers. You got Mr R's condition? It's schizophrenia, that's his main health condition. He can, yes yes, sorry, and obsessive compulsive disorder. Mum saying the biggest problem is he's angry almost every day, and get upset even by himself. If you talk to him not the way he likes he may just get heated off. Some time ago even hit back the mother. It's very - hit physically and verbally attacked the mother. That's very violent. Sometimes he would hit the wall and hurt himself

A relevant part of the context here is Li Na's understanding that R failed to explain the severity of his condition when he attended the work capability assessment interview. Now she begins to co-construct the narrative with M so that she builds evidence for an appeal against the assessment. She asks (in Cantonese) 'you just said he gets angry - how often?' (turn 9). This is only one of a series of strategic questions which co-construct the narrative in a way that will support R's eligibility for benefits. The narrative emerges piece by piece, prompted by Li Na. Her questions are initially open, allowing M space to elaborate: 'then what does he do?' (turn 11), 'what's his biggest problem?' (turn 13). However, these questions do not immediately elicit the kind of evidence she needs, so she shifts her strategy from open to closed questions: 'does he hurt people?', 'is he violent?' (turn 15). M's responses are not confined to 'yes' / 'no' answers. Unprompted, she narrates a brief tale about the occasion when R sent a text to his sister, threatening to kill her children. Finally, the

benefits officer returns to the telephone and Li Na begins to re-shape the narrative through recontextualisation.

Li Na summarises for the benefits officer what M has told her. As she does so she recontextualises and intensifies the emergent narrative. M's account that her son hit her 'a long time ago' (turn 16) is recontextualised as 'some time ago' (turn 21). Li Na emphasises R's violence, 'even hit back the mother', 'physically and verbally attacked the mother'. Li Na then adds an evaluative comment, 'that's very violent' (turn 21). This intervention indexes Li Na's authority to advise the benefits officer, to comment on M's narrative, and highlight a key point. The narrative begins to represent R as very violent, and the implication is that he is therefore unfit for work, and eligible for welfare benefits. This discourse, now freed from its original context, translated into English, reported to the benefits officer, and (we assume) typed into the DWP database which holds information about R, becomes available as evidence about the case. The recontextualisation alters the power and persuasiveness of the narrative. Before Li Na's questions 'does he hurt people?', and 'is he violent?' (turn 15), the issue of R's aggressive behaviour had not arisen. Now M's narrative is transformed into a written account of R's violent tendencies, entered into the official record.

In *Example 3* Li Na is still connected to the benefits office by telephone, but is speaking to M. The benefits officer is typing details into the computer.

*Example 3*

22 L 而家仲打你有?

[ does he still hit you? ]

23 M 而家冇,佢搬開去住嗎

[ not now, he moved to his own place ]

24 L 搬左幾耐?

[ for how long? ]

25 M 十七八年到啦

[ about seventeen, eighteen years ]

26 L ((to B:)) mum just added, because they used to be living together, now R is living in his own council house, so when they were living together, just because of some words mum said he doesn't like, he just physically attacked her. Now he is living in his own property, he doesn't have the opportunity to hit the mum physically now, but he will be hurting himself by hitting against the wall, and break the windows and the doors and the glasses.

Li Na continues with the theme of domestic violence, seeking evidence that will strengthen R's case. She asks M (in Cantonese), 'does he still hit you?' (turn 22). M replies that R has not lived with her for seventeen or eighteen years. Li Na immediately speaks to the benefits officer on the telephone, and offers a recontextualised summary of M's narrative. In Li Na's recontextualisation, 'he just physically attacked her' (turn 26) is substituted in place of 'he hit me a long time ago' (turn 16). In Li Na's version the period of time R has been living away from his parents, and therefore the period since he has been violent towards his mother, is erased. M's statement 'hits his head' (turn 12) is reworded and intensified as 'he will be hurting himself by hitting against the wall' (turn 26). Li Na repeats M's story that R breaks windows, and adds 'and the doors and glasses' (turn 26). In this recontextualisation she further intensifies R's propensity for violent behaviour. In *Example 4* Li Na prompts M's narrative with another question.

*Example 4*

27 L 佢劈野係咪見到乜嘢都劈

[ Does he throw things, anything? ]

28 M 佢唔鍾意啲就劈架

[ Whatever he doesn't like ]

29 L [to B:] It's like those things whatever he doesn't like he will break or smash them, erm sorry I need to wait until you finish, am I (6)

For example, just when he was texting the sister who lives in Scotland he was, er, texting, texting his sister who's living in Scotland, he would say, when your children come to me I will kill them next time. Very threatening, and that sounds very scary to me. In the answers sent from the health professional, saying he is denying any episode of violence, this is not true. On that day when he attends the er, the interview, as I said he went there by himself. If he be accompanied by his parents I am sure the answer wouldn't be the same. He's denying anything. Yes if yep (5) let me, and he doesn't stay still, you know he's always pacing, or just not in his chair (5) kind of he cannot control himself, you know, unlike us when we are doing something we need to be still and quiet for that time, not for him

Li Na continues to co-construct M's narrative, asking a further strategic question which is designed to elicit evidence of R's unreasonable behaviour. She immediately translates M's answer for the benefits officer on the phone ('whatever he doesn't like', turn 28), and

intensifies the account with the addition of ‘break or smash them’ (turn 29). Li Na summarises M’s dramatic account of her son’s text message to his sister. In doing so she quotes directly, in a ventriloquated version of the text message, ‘when your children come to me I will kill them next time’ (turn 29). Deictics play a powerful role as recontextualisation here. The substitution of ‘he’ in M’s account with ‘I’ (‘I will kill them next time’) places the benefits officer close to the narrated action. Li Na makes a further metapragmatic evaluation, ‘very threatening, and that sounds very scary to me’ (turn 29), drawing the benefits officer’s attention to the text message as an example of unreasonable behaviour.

Li Na refers to the letter which states that R’s application for benefits has been unsuccessful (‘in the answers sent from the health professional’, turn 29). She focuses on the health professional’s account that R ‘is denying any episode of violence’. Li Na tells the benefits officer directly, ‘this is not true’. Li Na goes on to translate the segment of M’s narrative in which she had said (in Cantonese) R ‘can’t keep still’, and ‘walks up and down’. Li Na’s narrative recontextualises M’s story, adding ‘he cannot control himself’ (turn 29). Now Li Na shifts her footing (Goffman 1981) to align herself with the benefits officer, and, by implication, with the majority of people who are ‘like us’. She again achieves this through deixis, including herself and the benefits officer in the group collectively defined as ‘us’, and referred to as ‘we’. R, referred to as ‘he’, and ‘him’, is different from ‘us’. He is non-normative, and, implicitly, should be treated as an exception, and therefore eligible for benefits. In *Example 5* Li Na continues to ask questions to prompt M’s narrative.

#### *Example 5*

- 30 L 頭先我講咗幾個,仲有冇野補充? 話佢唔可以坐定㗎 不停行來行去控制唔到自己
- [ I just mentioned a few things, anything else? He cannot keep still, walks around, cannot control himself ]
- 31 M 佢成日話我地俾壓力佢囉
- [ He says we give him pressure ]
- 32 L 你認為佢講嘅係唔合理㗎,唔講道理㗎?
- [ You think he is unreasonable? ]
- 33 M 聽唔入耳架
- [ He won't listen ]
- 34 L 有冇同你 argue?
- [ Do you argue? ]
- 35 M 我唔敢同佢 argue 架佢開口都粗口㗎
- [ We get frightened when we argue, he swears ]
- 36 L 如果發脾氣嗰陣 無人控制
- [ If he is in a bad temper nobody can control him? He is on medication ]
- 37 M 冇架,等佢發到自己停
- [ No, we have to leave it until it subsides ]
- 38 L ((to B)) If the medication can't get it under control, they have to leave it until the anger dies down by itself. They can't control that, and then when the parents talk to him they feel what R says is very unreasonable. But they don't dare argue with him, because he would be verbally very aggressive, and the

swearing and shouting and anger could be getting even more out of control, so just the parents listen to whatever you say.

Li Na summarises the narrative so far. In doing so she adds to M's account ('he cannot keep still, walks around') an element of her own narrative told to the benefits officer ('cannot control himself', turn 30). Li Na asks M, 'if he is in a bad temper no-one can control him?' (turn 36). She returns to the telephone interaction and says to the benefits officer, 'if the medication cannot get it under control they have to leave it until the anger dies down by himself, they cannot control that' (turn 38). A moment later she adds, 'anger could be getting even more out of control'. The notion of (being out of) control, never explicitly mentioned by M, becomes a key motif in Li Na's narrative. Li Na has now argued that R 'cannot control himself' (turn 30), 'nobody can control him' (turn 36), 'the medication cannot get it under control' (turn 38), 'they can't control that' (turn 38), and 'anger could be getting even more out of control' (turn 38). The notion that R is 'out of control' is recontextualised in Li Na's discourse, and in her narrative R is laminated as one who is out of control and therefore unfit for work. Through recontextualisation the argument that R is unfit for work, and therefore eligible for benefits, becomes firmly established.

*Example 6*

39 L 我哋咁樣講 佢係咪有意見?

[ If he heard us talking about him what would he think? ]

40 M 而家暫時可能冇乜意見 如果有咩事 佢就挖出呢啲舊事 話我地架啦

[ It's all right for now, but if things are not good he will dig up things from the past and blame us ]

41 L 佢會唔會鬧我?

[ Will he curse me? ]

42 M 唔會

[ No ]

43 L ((to B)) Mum said when they go home he may just dig up what we have been talking about, he would start being abusive towards her, maybe if something he doesn't like.

Now he is quiet, he's not saying anything, because I'm here, it's the first time he saw me. He can talk to me. I couldn't see that he is violent or abusive because I am new to him, but when they go home some people he know could be different.

Mm hm, mm hm, let me just confirm with mum.

宋太,如果佢第一次見我 佢可以同我傾,好似冇事咁樣 返咗屋企佢就搵你地你來.

[ Mrs S he can talk to me normally because I am new to him, but at home he will have a go at you? ]

44 M 當唔啱佢心水 就挖出啲舊事嚟

[ If things are not good he will dig up things from the past ]

45 L 都係搵你地你嚟

[ Always go at you? ]

46 M 最親嘅人

[ Parents ]

47 L ((to B:)) She said, as I thought, he can pretend nothing is wrong with him, he only lets out towards people who are closest and dearest to him, who he knows

Li Na constructs the outcome of the work capability assessment as flawed and unsafe by implying that the health professional misread R at the interview. Her account for the benefits officer translates M's narrative and intensifies it. M's story is that R 'will dig up things from the past and blame us' (turn 40). Li Na's version substitutes 'blame us' with 'start being abusive towards her' (turn 43), representing R as quick-tempered and abusive. Li Na offers a small narrative with which to discredit the work capability assessment. She implies that if she was unable to see that R is violent and abusive herself, the health professional who conducted the work capability assessment may have similarly misjudged him. Seeking a clinching confirmation, she asks M (in Cantonese) to ratify her summary of the case, 'he can talk to me normally because I am new to him, but at home he will have a go at you?' (turn 43). However, the confirmation does not straightforwardly arrive, as M merely repeats her earlier point, 'if things are not well he will dig out things from the past' (turn 44).

Li Na asks one more question, which again elicits an ambiguous response, before returning to the benefits officer to summarise her main argument that 'he can pretend nothing is wrong with him' (turn 47). With a reporting verb ('she said'), Li Na attributes this statement to M. However, there is no evidence that M said that R was prone to pretend that he did not have a serious health condition. Li Na's apparent quotation is a strategic recontextualisation with which to discredit the legitimacy of the DWP assessment. At the nexus of translation and recontextualisation, Li Na is willing to reshape the narrative to advance the case of her clients. Unencumbered by the impartiality required of the professional translator/interpreter, and unconstrained by the honesty demanded of a legal advisor or lawyer, the advice and advocacy worker recontextualises her client's story to meet the criteria for the welfare benefits claim.

## **5. Discussion and conclusion**

In the interaction in the advice and advocacy service Li Na recontextualises M's narrative about her son R, in order to appeal against an official assessment which disqualifies R from receiving welfare benefits. In doing so she engages not only in interlingual, intralingual, and intersemiotic translation, but also in (*inter alia*) re-narration, substitution, addition, deletion, ventriloquation, metapragmatic commentary, deixis, and direct and indirect reported speech. These recontextualisation strategies enable Li Na to reshape her client's narrative to favour her son's application for Employment and Support Allowance. Li Na asks strategic questions to elicit specific evidence from her client, co-constructing the narrative from the outset. She understands the relevant context here: evidence of violence, loss of control, and unreasonable behaviour will be compelling factors in overturning the government department's decision to deny R welfare benefits. Li Na therefore introduces these elements into the story, repeating and intensifying them to increase their persuasive power. Aspects of the co-constructed narrative which might stand against R's appeal are backgrounded, substituted, and at times erased altogether. Li Na introduces a narrative about her own relationship with R as evidence that the original assessment was invalid and illegitimate. She deploys deixis to align herself with the benefits officer, and to create an opposition between R's behaviour and acceptable social norms.

Li Na is more concerned with ensuring a positive outcome for her client than she is with correctness or equivalence in her translation of M's narrative. Her translation does not stand in a neutral space (Tymoczko 2014: 316). At the interface of advice and advocacy Li Na

makes decisions which are designed to favour her client. Inghilleri (2017: 57) points out that some of the simplest decisions translators make involve complex moral and ethical dilemmas. Li Na makes choices about what values and institutions to support and oppose, advocating on behalf of her clients even as she makes choices about how to transpose M's narrative (Tymoczko 2014). In the analysis of this interaction we gain new insights into the communicative practices of people in the superdiverse city. Translation is a key means by which migrants are able to navigate their environment. This process of translation is about more than the transfer or equivalence of meaning. As well a translator, Li Na is a cultural mediator, and a negotiator (Tymoczko 2014).

As Li Na explains the complexity of the benefits system to the family, her task is not limited to interlingual translation. It is rather the translation of a welter of unfamiliar terms and acronyms, a web of rules and regulations. Translators are called upon not only to clarify linguistic or cultural issues, but to help ensure that all parties' interests and points of view are adequately understood (Inghilleri 2017). Li Na positions herself as one who knows about the benefits system, establishing her credentials through her apparent ease with complexity. She is 'opening out the folds' (Ricouer 2006: 26) of the benefits system gradually and patiently.

Li Na's questions prompt and co-construct the narrative. The challenge now is to reformulate the narrative so that it meets the criteria for the client's claim for Employment and Support Allowance. In short, Li Na does whatever she can to recontextualise the narrative to give her client a chance of receiving the welfare benefits for which he has applied. Her interlingual translation moves fluidly and fluently across and within languages. Her translation is also intralingual, as she rewords M's story, summarising some parts, elaborating upon others, prompting additional material with careful questioning. In Iedema's (2001) terms, Li Na's

translation of M's narrative is also intersemiotic, as the story, told in Cantonese in the small first floor office of a city community centre, is reformulated in English through the semiotic domains of telephone and government computer.

Furthermore, the advisor explains to her client regulatory elements of the official process of appealing against the decision of the government department. Indeed Li Na's co-construction and recontextualisation of M's story is entirely characterized by translation. She translates M's fragmentary and unfocused narrative as a story which constructs R as someone so given to violence, so unreasonable, and so out of control that he must be awarded the benefits for which he has applied. She constructs the original work capability assessment as an illegitimate process.

In the translation zone recontextualisation and translation are integral to each other, and inseparable elements of a single process. It is this intermeshing of translation and recontextualisation that enables Li Na to reshape her client's narrative. In the practice of Li Na this process is about advocacy, and working for what she believes to be the best interests of her client. Her attention does not appear to be focused on neutrality, or on the ethics of equivalence in translation. At the end of the appointment, speaking directly to R now, Li Na says 'I am just letting them know the truth, the answers you gave them are not up to what mum has been describing'. She adds, however, that she is not confident that the decision will be overturned by the government decision-maker, saying, 'it's very difficult to appeal unless you think the government did something wrong, very wrong'. Li Na has done all she can to translate and recontextualise the narrative in a way that gives her client the best possible chance of being granted the benefits for which he has applied. Now they must wait.

## **Appendix**

### **Transcription key**

[ Then what does he do? ]	English translation on Cantonese speech
(( to M: ))	Stage directions
(6)	Pause, in seconds

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