The volume, originally entitled *Formas de mediación intercultural: traducción e interpretación en los servicios públicos. Conceptos, datos, situaciones y práctica*, by Carmen Valero-Garcés, is a reference book, focused on one of the most recent applied studies in the field of translation and interpretation for public services (T and IPS). The first edition appeared in 2008 in Granada, published by Comares, and was revised and re-edited by the same publishing company in 2010. The translation and editing of the Romanian version was coordinated by Anca Greere and Rodica Baconsky, from “Babeș-Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca.

The second edition (Valero-Garcés 2010) gathers recent, rather scarce, research and data on the international current situation of T and IPS in the world, with special emphasis on Spain. The author generally focuses on the cognitive and linguistic features of T and IPS, the methodological aspects, codes of conduct and psycho-social, cultural details of mediation as a form of communication in public services.

Despite the fact that this kind of cultural exchange and mediation has been existent for decades or even centuries, it is only in the last decade that T and IPS have acquired a major significance in applied linguistics. If we consider diplomatic documents, for instance, which are internationally recognized and ratified, we take those texts to be available in several languages and thus, they will reflect all the possible common aspects of social, economic, cultural and political activity of the states involved (cf. US Charter, EU Charter for Human Rights, etc.). Such documents necessarily reflect the communities’ approach to common understanding and view on the world and their cultural knowledge and perception, in general).

Valero-Garcés is an experienced trainer and coordinator of several projects and programmes devoted to translation and interpretation studies for public services, and her published work in this respect stands proof of a constant interest both in the process and expertise of translation and interpretation and in improving the students’ competence and skills as well as their practice in the field.

According to Valero-Garcés, the impact of culture on T and IPS is a recurrent issue in translation and interpretation practice. In Spain, cultural mediation *per se* is a relatively new phenomenon, as it only appeared in 2000. This domain is not wholly defined and regulation of the profession of mediator and area of research are hardly clarified and circumscribed (see Salhab 1995). However, ever since this year onwards, studies, practical information and applied research have become apparent not only in Spain, but in the United States, Australia and in other parts of the world, the European Union included. Intercultural, inter-linguistic mediation for public services have been required in a variety of situations: community councils, police stations, immigration and refugee centres, penitentiaries, hospitals, telephone conversations, etc. In the United Kingdom, for instance, social work and senior healthcare centre activity are closely related with education and shelter supply within public services, a fact that calls for adequate, competent knowledge and understanding of cultural mediation (Corsellis 2003).

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As regards the structure of the book, it must be outlined that the author anticipated further
interest and preoccupation in translation and interpretation services within PS, therefore, each
chapter is organised into three different sections, so as to include: introductory information on the
profession and or domain of research in T and IPS or theoretical concepts and description of
features of translation and interpretation (section 1); practical information and activities regarding
language enhancement and applied language research or ethical issues related to the application of
the professional codes (section 2); bibliographical references (section 3).

Chapter one, “Comunicación interlingüística: Introducción a la traducción y la
interpretación” (pp. 13-41), tackles interlinguistic communication and subsumes translation and
interpretation to it, while stressing the fact that bilingualism is a competence – totally different
from translation (see pp. 5-8). Chapter two, entitled “Traducción e interpretación en los servicios
públicos. Estado de la cuestión” (pp. 43-92), launches the idea that translation and interpretation
for public services is in fact a new investigation area, a new academic subject to be included in the
regular curriculum for training language students in translation and interpretation studies. The
author illustrates this statement by briefly presenting the British, the Australian, the Canadian, and
the European situation in reputed universities (see Sherrill 1997). According to the author,
translation and interpretation for public services is an emerging profession, especially in countries
such as Spain, which regularly receives immigrant population. Chapter three, “Características de la
traducción e interpretación para los servicios públicos” (pp. 101-164), describes the specific
features of this profession (acquired competence) and extensively comments on the “good
practice” code of conduct. Carmen Valero-Garcés is of the opinion that interlinguistic
communication in public services cannot exclude cultural communication, on the contrary.
Therefore, culture awareness, in parallel with bi-language awareness, must be an essential part in a
translator/interpreter’s academic training. Chapter four, “Introducción de la interpretación para los
servicios públicos. Formación y práctica” (pp. 165-198), exclusively tackles interpretation for
public services and describes the various types of interpretation and the required skills in the
profession. Within the interpreter training techniques, special attention must be paid to the
emotional impact of T and IPS upon the translator/interpreter. In this particular respect, special
training techniques are meant to prepare the trainees how to cope with emotional impact while
mastering linguistic and cultural communication skills.

The last chapter, “Introducción de la interpretación para los servicios públicos”
(pp. 199-231) is specifically focused on the nature of translation and interpretation for public
services, the basic professional requirements for a good translator to comply with bi-lingual and
cultural mediation and the tools that a translator or interpreter may be using during the process of
mediation (CAT, terminological glossaries, technical equipment, etc.). Mediation, of an
interpretative nature, is the essential dimension of interpreter training, since it must include both
linguistic and cultural communication, by way of the professional interpreter (Angelelli 2003).

The Romanian version of the present volume signals the utility of expertise in cultural
mediation through language (translation and interpretation), in countries such as Spain or
Romania, where translation and interpretation for public services are regarded as incipient, but
promising professional careers. The Spanish revised edition (Valero-Garcés 2010) contains 259
pages, the general bibliography is quite extensive (35 pages) and covers a wide range of reference
volumes related to translation, interpretation and terminological studies. The Romanian version of
the book includes a Spanish-Romanian terminological glossary; this mini-glossary includes a
range of related concepts, defined and extensively used within the content of the book (e.g. actividad translativa ‘activitate de transfer cultural’, competencia traductora ‘competenţa de
traducere’, cultura meta ‘cultură ţintă’, etc.).

To conclude, the present volume is both useful and significant for having marked the
impact of a new – but extremely pervasive type of translation and interpretation, which serves
several purposes: it makes public services more efficient and client-oriented, it mediates cultures and languages, and it contributes to common understanding and social, moral and economic integration of different people within the European local communities.

References


Reviewed by Silvia Florea* 

Politeness, as a synonym of polite social behaviour, good manners, or social niceness, includes sets of strategies that are widely and consensually employed in verbal communication in order to maintain (or disrupt) social harmony within a culture. Over the past few decades, linguistic theories of politeness have explored the ways in which verbal and non-verbal communicative strategies can be used to enhance social harmony. Hence, various definitions, provided by linguistic scholars and researchers, have attempted to encapsulate the meaning of this “slippery, ultimately indefinable quality of interaction” that politeness represents in Watts’ (2003) view. Whether “a means of minimizing confrontation in discourse” (Lakoff 1989) or a constraint on human interaction, whose purpose is to consider other’s feelings, establish levels of mutual comfort, and promote rapport” (Hill et al. 1986), politeness, as social norm, has been regarded as a fundamental means of minimizing potential clashes and preventing conflict in verbal interaction.

To Geoffrey Leech, politeness is a deeper phenomenon, something that human communicators would find it hard to do without. His book on the Pragmatics of Politeness is a new swim against the tide of traditional and contemporary research on politeness and a fresh examination of politeness and impoliteness working out through contemporary extended

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discourse. With approaches to cover ever rising theoretical, historical and practical dimensions of linguistic politeness, getting lost in the maze of the many faceted, dynamically ever changing interpretations seems an almost inevitable trap, however Leech’s “road (not) taken” pursues the linguistic roots of pragmatics and allows him to meaningfully see the forest for the trees.

The book is structured into eleven sections or parts, all set under three main overarching thematic constructs: The first, “Laying the foundations” (pp. 3-115), emphasizes the features of politeness (“Introduction”, pp. 3-28) and provides an overview of existing theories of politeness (sections 2 and 3, pp. 28-80) from a historical Anglo-American perspective. It places priority on the refining of his past theories (Section 4, pp. 80-115), particularly on his “Principle of Politeness” and his extension of his previous list of maxims (increasing them from six to ten) by reformulating in variant manifestations, marginal or mainstream, his supermaxim or superstrategy (GSP).

With “Politeness and impoliteness in the use of English” (pp. 115-247) the focus of the second part shifts to more detailed examinations of politeness phenomena in English, ranging from apologies (section 5, pp. 115-134), requests (section 6, pp. 134-180), offers, agreements, congratulations (section 7, pp. 180-216), to impoliteness, irony, sarcasm and banter (Section 8, pp. 216-247) whose latter understanding, he argues, depends on politeness for explanation.

Coming full circle, the last part, “Further perspectives” (pp. 247-303), offers several insights into the pragmatics of politeness, in terms of knowledge and evidence (section 9, pp. 247-261), second language acquisition of politeness skills (section 10, pp. 261-283), and a most rewarding, we may add, taste of a diachronic perspective of politeness across over a millennium of history (section 11, pp. 283-303).

Leech’s book on politeness is predicated on a decidedly “pragmalinguistic” stance and remains a remarkable descriptive accomplishment of contemporary politeness phenomena, having successfully avoided the prescriptive trap. For all its comprehensiveness, the book has fallen inevitable prey to the biased Western, Anglo-American approach by ignoring considerable, we claim radical, manifestations of politeness across the linguistic communities’ spectrum, counterpointed by Leech, only to some extent in section 4, in which he discusses norms of politeness across the Chinese, Japanese and Korean cultures. And while we hold that the vast community of English-language users and the socio-cultural variables across the region, age, gender and social class spectrums remain generally misrepresented in Leech’s book, we cannot but understand that many of these issues have not yet been thoroughly researched and a major endeavour, such as his, would considerably require more thought and space in the future research design and output of this field.

Geoffrey Leech’s Pragmatics of Politeness manages to successfully evaluate the explanatory power of the theory of politeness and provide a robust framework that generates a better understanding of it. As such, it is destined to remain not only a new classic in the field of politeness research, but also a remarkable attempt to define the indefinable.

References