

Developing the role of the interlingual disaster communication mediator

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This paper - taken from my current PhD research – assesses the use of citizen and volunteer translators in disaster preparedness and response. To do so, it draws upon existing projects - in particular, Interpreters-in-Aid at Disasters and INTERACT- focusing on the development of training for those who take on the role of the translator in disaster response. The paper argues that, whilst the activities and training delivered by these projects are potentially fruitful, they are not without their drawbacks – in particular, the paper questions whether the deployment of citizen and volunteer translators renders operations vulnerable through reliance upon individuals who may be unwilling or unable to assist. As a result, the paper proposes that the role of the translator in disaster response should be developed as that of a standalone professional, whose specialist responsibilities might be better defined as those of an interlingual disaster communication mediator.

The paper argues that the titles translator and interpreter do not adequately reflect the activities that these individuals are tasked with. Often, owing to a number of factors such as the wide misunderstandings of translation and interpretation, they are charged with tasks that fall outside of the traditional boundaries of the roles or conversely, the individuals are underutilised. Naming the role accordingly could help not only to mitigate misuse, but also allow for better training and regulation of the role.

Drawing upon aspects of the invaluable work of the aforementioned existing projects, as well as real-world experience and voices from the field, the paper outlines what this professional might look like. It argues, in particular, that the development of the profession of the interlingual disaster communication mediator in the private sector is a valuable step towards addressing the issues of the use of a volunteer cohort, while at the same time bolstering the effectiveness of the translational activities that are required during disasters.