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Towards language justice: queering solidarities between interpreters, service providers, and community members

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This article is a dialogue between community interpreters (Arabic and Spanish), service provider (narrative therapy practitioner), and a community member (Spanish-speaking) exploring the linguistic challenges that LGBTIQ+ Forcibly Displaced People (LFDP) experience during their settlement process in Australia. English language supremacy shapes the forms of epistemic and structural injustice that subjugate LFDP. In order to highlight the power invested in language services, the authors examine queer and feminist interpreting and translating practices which centre lived experience. This article proposes a practice of solidarity between the language practitioner (community interpreter), community member and service provider in the context of LFDP, which may be in tension with the AUSIT Code of Ethics' principles of impartiality and neutrality. The authors suggest the need for community interpreters to engage in more meaningful allyship and solidarity with LFDP, their histories, and lived experiences in order to achieve best outcomes for the community.

KEYWORDS

queer (LGBTQ), language justice, forcibly displaced people, refugee, asylum seeker, lived experience

Introduction

The relationship between language practitioner (community interpreter), community member and service provider represents a microcosm of the political, social and cultural dynamics at play in language. The intersectional experiences of LGBTIQ+ Forcibly Displaced People (LFDP) in Australia as consumers of language services necessitates a closer examination of the status quo within the field. The settlement outcomes of LFDP are adversely affected by inadequate access to help in their language, which entrenches discrimination in key service areas such as employment, healthcare, and education¹ (FDPN, 2023).

1 Forcibly Displaced People Network's, 2023 report "Inhabiting Two Worlds at Once" provided recommendations for service providers, including a need for further language accessibility, in order to ensure that support services are "aware of the linguistic diversity within the community and provide resources and information in languages other than English." There was also a recommendation to "invest in translation services to facilitate communication" as many LGBTIQ+ specialist organisations rely on English in their verbal communication, forms and resources (13).

Upon LFDP's arrival and settlement to Australia, their intersectional experiences arise from insecure visa status, discrimination faced on account of gender and/or sexuality, racism, histories of trauma, war, state violence, economic instability due to lack of work rights, and lack of support in their mother tongue or chosen language (FDPN, 2023). Additionally, psychological and physical persecution, as well as neglect and alienation from family, community, and religious groups are common experiences shared by many transgender asylum seekers (Güler et al., 2019).

LFDP have a broad range of experiences that include being forcibly displaced from one's home country, climate crisis, religious, community, and familial discrimination, as well as diverse sexual orientations, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) (FDPN, 2023). LFDP often arrive in Australia speaking little to no English, and face complicated challenges in working with an interpreter, such as an interpreter harbouring prejudice and judgment against LGBTIQ+ communities, or lacking knowledge about the histories of persecution of LGBTIQ+ people in their home country that may shape how they interact with services (FDPN, 2023). As such, their access to services that assist with the settlement process and participation in everyday life is compromised: they often cannot speak of their experiences or suffering, or gain help, in their preferred language. LFDP face language injustice within their host country, which contributes to a pervasive social, cultural and political exclusion experienced in the process of seeking safety (FDPN, 2023).

While the role of community interpreter facilitates individuals' fundamental right to communicate and be understood in their preferred language, often the intersections, histories, and lived experiences of LFDP are misunderstood, stigmatised, or dismissed by language services. Both LFDP and service providers (counsellors, general practitioners, social workers, etc.) collaborate with community interpreters in enabling access to resources, information and services. Government bodies, along with a plethora of other organisations, consider the utilisation of interpreting services as sufficient management of language injustice. This superficial remedy ("just request an interpreter") often lacks understanding of the lived experiences and needs of LFDP.

Linguistic imperialism, a process which continues the act of colonisation through government policies, laws, and civil life, plays out when LFDP access support services (Hudley et al., 2024). The proliferation of English marginalises non-dominant languages, which can lead to the erosion of cultural identities (Hudley et al., 2024). First Nations communities and people who arrive to this continent speaking languages of their home country confront the violence of this monolingualism, and its dismissal of localised culture, relationships and worldviews. The resultant language barriers limit people's ability to meaningfully participate in social and political life (UNHR, 2025). LFDP then encounter epistemic injustice where their knowledge and lived experiences are systematically excluded in dominant institutions. These embedded socio-political barriers—such as visa precarity, language discrimination and service inaccessibility—restrict their rights and dignity (Savci, 2021; FDPN, 2023).

We propose that interpreters could take up an engagement of allyship² and solidarity³ when working with LFDP, as often the assistance that is needed goes beyond simply facilitating communication. For example, 50% of participants in the "Inhabiting Two Worlds at Once" report describe experiences of housing discrimination due to a complex intersection of insecure visa status, unemployment, English language difficulty and prejudice based on SOGIESC status (FDPN, 2023, p. 39). A practice of allyship takes into consideration the intersectional experiences of LFDP in migration and subsequent settlement, acknowledging the particular ways that LFDP are "multiply-burdened" (Hernández et al., 2021; see Marianacci, 2024, for a further exploration on allyship in interpreting practice in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand). While allyship emphasises an external source of support for a marginalised community, solidarity involves a mutual struggle alongside others on the basis of shared and deeply empathetic experiences (Susam-Saraeva et al., 2023). Through their experiences of displacement from their home country, the discrimination on the basis of their overlapping identities (gender, relationships, bodies, sexuality and sex characteristics) is heightened and emphasised (Hernández et al., 2021).

Queering our methodology

We take up queer theory's invitation to problematise how "otherness" is represented, concerned with the term "queer" as it pertains to non-normative expression, gender, sexual desire and relationships (Baer and Kaindl, 2018). Queer theory, alongside other poststructuralist approaches such as intersectional feminisms, has us mindful of how knowledge is produced, and whose knowledge is valued. In the process of developing the methodology, it was important for us to ensure that the principles we are advocating for are reflected in the production and sharing of knowledge (Savci, 2021). Hence queering the methodology required the challenging of normative and

2 Findings from Marianacci (2024) on the relationship between interpreters taking up a social justice and anti-oppressive practice with community members in Aotearoa New Zealand detail how interpreters act as allies. Allyship is described as a combination of awareness and social action, where there is meaningful relationship built between those striving to be allies, and the members of non-dominant groups (118). Allyship, rather than advocacy, avoids paternalistic attitudes. Allyship is interested in the complex and flexible position that interpreters take up in the interpretive event, which accounts for the navigation of power across peoples intersectional identities (119).

3 Eduardo Galiano, Uruguayan journalist says, "I do not believe in charity. I believe in solidarity. Charity is so vertical. It goes from the top to the bottom. Solidarity is horizontal. It respects the other person. I have a lot to learn from other people" (as interviewed in Barsamian, 2004, p. 146). We consider solidarity rooted in social justice ethics, that motivates action as Bryn Kelly said, solidarity is a series of acts, a lifetime of choices and self-education, a deeply felt human compassion (as quoted in Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2019).

traditional structures of research by employing non-extractive practices⁴ that invited accountability for each person involved. This enabled us to centre the lived experiences and histories of marginalised community members (Savci, 2021; Susam-Saraeva et al., 2023).

Historically, it has proven difficult to have conversations with language service users. This is due to the challenges in gaining ethics approval and out of a desire to protect vulnerable community members, however, theirs is a voice that is sorely missing from discourse and research and arguably one of the most important. Occasionally, there is a debrief between a service provider and interpreter but rarely is there the opportunity to reflect on the interpreting dynamic. The institutional roles of the three parties in an interpreted encounter prevent us from sharing and building knowledge. Although we are often prevented from producing knowledge and organising around shared work, when we come together, we can speak richly about the challenges we encounter, and possible solutions.

The roles that we occupy as interpreters, service providers, and community collaborators shape the lens and framing through which we interpret the dialogue used in this article. For example, the narrative therapist (service provider) is aware of the expectation imposed on mental health professionals whereby an interpreter's role is relegated to simply passing a message between the community member and themselves. However, this idea can inhibit more therapeutic forms of engagement. It is important to mention that lived experience of the authors and participants,⁵ is valued alongside

academic and theoretical knowledge. We are aware that there can be a hierarchy which places knowledge or findings gathered through scientific or academic methods, above knowledge garnered from lived experience (Batiwala, 2019). Our interest in knowledge grounded in lived experience significantly connects to our broader ethical commitments in this research.

We notice that flattening Paige Matthews' experience as one of our collaborators as a "service user" invisibilises her extensive experience in trans activism and advocacy in Latin America. As such, we opt for the term "community representative" to acknowledge the lived experience of political persecution, forced displacement, cultural knowledge, resistance, creativity and important analysis she brought to this conversation. From the beginning of contact with Paige, her involvement was navigated through a process of "rolling consent," where it was made clear her participation could be withdrawn at any point, without any consequence, and that expressions could be edited, and privacy assured (Lee, 2017).

Most professional organisations' codes of ethics prohibit "dual relationships" due to the risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client (Barsky, 2022). However, queer perspectives suggest that these multiple relationships establish safety because we may be more accountable to the community (Hanman-Siegersma, 2024). In this context, we are constantly negotiating and talking about how power is operating rather than pretending it does not exist (Tilsen, 2021 in Hoff, 2022). Through this accountability, we also wanted to address contexts of "tokenistic involvement" that often seek to engage people with intersectional experiences through an extractive approach (Lee, 2023). We took up a culturally affirming horizontal methodology, interested in dialogue⁶ as a site of learning and critical consciousness (Barmigan, 2003; Freire, 1997, 2000). As such, even though Paige had indicated she was happy to reflect on her experience with interpreters, her working relationship with Blossom, one of the Spanish interpreters, had been of a particularly sensitive nature. Therefore, before referring to any examples, Blossom would speak to Paige in Spanish about the example that had sprung to mind before sharing, with consent, to the bigger group. This included offering different names or changing the references to services.

As a group, we had been inspired by the feminist roundtable interpreting article, a "collaborative, polyphonic debate" (Susam-Saraeva et al., 2023). The dialogues were semi-structured and based on collective narrative practice inspired questions,⁷ conducted over three facilitated sessions in Naarm (Melbourne) where participants

4 Collaborating across differences brings into question the histories and practices that have sought to obtain knowledge and stories from colonised lands, cultures and peoples, for the benefit of researchers, academics or professionals occupying positions of class and dominant cultural privilege. The "colonial matrix" of the coloniser, and colonised—we use these terms aware of their fraught and problematic binary nature—is further complicated by the relationship between a language service user, and a language service practitioner (Mignolo, 2018, p. 108 quoted in Chetty et al., 2024, p. 245). We needed to address the silent, and operative ways power might be negotiated through this dialogue. Narrative therapist and social worker, Carmen Ostranda's, Framework Questions for "Multiple Relationships" speaks to a responsibility in attending to the various locations of power in community: (1) are there any stories/ideas I hold of this person that get in the way? (2) Does anything I know about this person interrupt me being of use? (3) How might this change their experience in the community if I am present? (4) How might this change my experience of the community if they are there? (Ostrander, quoted in Reynolds and Faulkner, 2023). The considerations from Ostranda encouraged us to cultivate a space of reflexivity and encourage positionality within our dialogue (Hudley et al., 2024, p. 150). We also considered ensuring there were opportunities for bilateral learning, sharing and understanding within the group, to avoid an experience of Paige feeling as though we were gathering information about her experience, but rather sharing from our multiple locations.

5 The term "lived experience" is used to describe the knowledge that is gained by personal experience. In the community services sector, lived experience is often a term that is used in co-design to engage people and communities who have personal experience of mental distress, social issues or injustice that has significantly impacted their lives. The valuing of lived experience speaks to a desire to use these experiences and stories in order to assist other people who might go through similar hardships, or to create systems change (Boniface and Hodges, 2022). In this context, we are valuing the expertise gained through the lived experience of our positions, rather than academic knowledge gained about the subject (Hodges and Reid, 2021).

6 Brazilian educator and theorist of critical pedagogy Paulo Freire saw dialogue infused with critical consciousness as a way to shake us out of taken-for-granted ways of relating with power, such as the "the top down" approach (1997 and 2000). In the context of LGBTIQ+ forcibly displaced peoples who are working with interpreters when interfacing with various mechanisms of support in Australia, the possibilities for dialogue are particularly contentious. Dialogue includes each person having the right to speak their words (Freire, 1997, 2000). In light of this, we were interested in dialogue as a site of learning, to relate horizontally instead of vertically from our different locations of experience (Barmigan, 2003).

7 Collective narrative practice focuses on the skills, knowledges and know-how of a community to address the problems that they are facing. See Denborough (2008) for more information and stories regarding collective narrative practice and its application with communities facing hardship and crisis.

were free to lead the conversation direction. This collaboration required the labour of a second Spanish interpreter, Monica Quijano, which spurred interesting insights and questions aligned with feminist principles discussed in [Norma and Garcia-Caro \(2016\)](#). As a result of the reflections on the distortion of voice and meaning, Monica entered the interaction as an “active partner,” surpassing her role as Paige’s interpreter ([Leanza et al., 2014](#), p. 90). Therefore, we encouraged Paige to speak freely and at length in Spanish without interruption (with some interpreting), later translating her speech from the transcripts into English. This resulted in English being decentred.

Given that the analysis for this article draws from a single dialogic exchange, we acknowledge the limitations of generalisability. The authors stress that the ideas explored in this article are a result of the specificity of time and place of this dialogue, the context, history, and lived experiences (including the gender, culture, race, class and sexuality) of the participants. As such, this work offers a situated, illustrative lens, engaging with multiple perspectives in the interpretive exchange, rather than an empirically generalisable claim. This method aligns with qualitative and feminist research traditions that centre *partial perspectives* ([Haraway, 1988](#), as discussed in [Savcı, 2021](#)) and embrace specificity over universality. Hence, permitting these experiences to surface prioritises highlighting structural and epistemic violence over universality.

English language supremacy

We use the term “English language supremacy”⁸ to discuss the labours that LFDP experience during their journey to, upon their arrival, and during everyday life in Australia. English language supremacy refers to the institutional and systemic prioritisation of English over other languages, resulting in structural exclusion of speakers of other languages ([Hudley et al., 2024](#)). Colonialism is intimately linked to language; as [Ndhlovu and Makalela \(2021, p. 8\)](#) write, “the twin processes of colonial imperialism and Christian modernity have had the most significant influence on the spread of monolingual thinking” ([Chetty et al., 2024, p. 249](#)). We began our conversation speaking about the imposition of English onto First Nations communities, their cultures and languages.

Paige:

I think it goes beyond imposition—beyond how they try to enforce the language and disguise this imposition as something more acceptable. It is more than just making people learn a new language, which is, in itself, a challenge. The people who have imposed English as a rule, as a language that supposedly connects

everyone, have not really established a clear foundation to prove that English truly connects people. The systems of politics within government, education, employment, and accessing housing cannot provide you with proper attention because if you do not speak the language, you need someone to convey your message. But that person interprets it in their own way. Sometimes, your voice is not actually heard. Instead, your message is delivered, when interpreted, not as you intended, but in a modified way.

Mikhael:

If you do not speak English, you cannot advocate for yourself. You cannot ask for your rights, yet, at the same time, you are still required to adhere to your responsibilities. They think the issue of not being able to advocate for your rights will be solved by speaking through an interpreter. Yet, they offer people an interpreter, put under the constraints of the AUSIT code of ethics, where they cannot actually help that person advocate for themselves, eliminating the interpreter’s agency.

The problem becomes that a person is forced to navigate a system where they are subjugated; they are the object of that institution. There is a power imbalance in every conversation and every interaction where they do not know what they are entitled to. They do not know when to speak up because in order to advocate, you need to know your rights.

Blossom:

Yes, and you realise they might not be aware of what they are entitled to and, as the interpreter, you realise your complicity. Is it enough to simply “enable communication”? It becomes about not just what is said but what is not said or known in terms of knowledge, power, or systems. An important mentor for us, clinical psychologist Dr. Radhika Santhanam–Martin, talks about “just practice” instead of “best practice” (Personal Communication, 2024).

The symptoms of language injustice and English supremacy are left to be experienced by the de-prioritised and multi-marginalised individuals.⁹ Language barriers frequently result in discrimination in employment and healthcare, creating additional layers of marginalisation ([FDPN, 2023](#)). There are often few means to hold these systems to account and truly remedy their consequences.

⁸ We use the term English language supremacy to speak to the “elevation of the knowledge systems of the colonisers,” which operates through the logics of white supremacy and Western cultural hegemony’ ([Hudley et al., 2024, p. 29](#)). This colonial linguistic hegemony acts to commodify, erase, and invalidate the linguistic experiences of LFDP who are arriving in Australia (150). The superior ranking of English as the national language of Australia presses upon the realities of many in the world who use multiple languages and varieties in everyday life (455).

⁹ The symptoms of language injustice, or linguistic discrimination operate by marginalising a person based upon their use of language and the characteristics of their speech, such as their mother tongue, accent, the perceived dimension or understanding of vocabulary, and their syntax. It is worth noting that for LFDP, discrimination can occur on multiple levels in regards to language and speech, especially for trans and gender diverse people, who will often seek voice modification such as speech therapy, hormone therapy, and in some cases, surgery. Language injustice for LGBTIQ+ people intersects with other structural inequities such as migration status, disability and race.

"My message is distorted": bringing feminist and queer approaches to knowledge generation across English and Spanish

The approach to interpreting and translating that is shaped by feminist and queer perspectives centres lived experience, challenging traditional ideas of interpreting practices (Baldo, 2021; Castro and Ergun, 2017). The vital inclusion of a community representative's voice resulted in a real-life demonstration of the concepts being explored by this paper. As we discussed how the interpreting process may distort a community member's voice, we saliently realised our participation in a similar violence. As Baer and Kaindl (2018) describe, translation inherently involves negotiating meanings across linguistic and cultural boundaries, inevitably reshaping original intentions and expressions.

Monica:

You [Paige] were saying, "My message is distorted; my voice is not the message that is delivered."

At the end of the day, the interpreter is saying whatever they want to say." I was trying to make sense of all the elements, to capture everything you said, but the nuance was not there because I had to cut your train of thought. I know that you are processing the ideas as you are speaking. And then I try to interpret, and I'm like, "oh my God, what we are talking about is exactly what I'm doing."

Interpretation, as it relates to our professional practices, extends beyond the transmission of meaning—it is a negotiation of power.¹⁰ In the context of interpreting for LGBTIQ+ people, these translations can both obscure and reveal queerness, highlighting inherent cultural biases and challenges in linguistic transfer¹¹ (Epstein and Gillett, 2017). It is important to notice how an interpreter's choices, constraints, and positionality inevitably shape and distort a speaker's voice. Expectations of neutrality and accuracy, as experienced by both interpreters and service providers, erase the emotional and ethical dimensions of our work.

10 In regards to feminist politics in interpreting practice, Begoña Martínez asserts that the AUSIT code of ethics "demands secrecy and confidentiality" as part of professionalism. As a feminist interpreter, she takes issue with having to "keep silent about many things we hear during our interpreting work that we would not keep silent about in any other aspect of our lives." For example, after a woman who had requested asylum, for whom she was interpreting for, had passed away, she could not discuss this with anybody. How can I delete a person from my mind when I have been interpreting her for months?" Martínez asks. Adhering to the ethics in this way "is silencing, it feels colonial" (Martínez in Susam-Saraeva et al., 2023).

11 As was exemplified by the obfuscation of meaning, or the distortion of Paige's voice through Monica's translation of her experiences to us, into English, we confronted the very real problem of one-to-one translation. This is a fundamental impossibility of language and translation, where the specificity of the lived experiences of LFDP are mediated through a language practitioner, who holds the powerful position of acting as their "voice." As Chetty says, any intellectual critique of linguistics should "engage with the hidden violence of language" (Chetty et al., 2024, p. 248).

Monica:

There is so much discourse about "being people's voice" but we change people's voices. And we should not be pretending we do not. Even if we were all speaking the same language. Even if we had a poem, or a story that was written in Spanish, and we each read it out, it would sound so different.

Each of our voices is unique. There is something really lovely about getting to know someone's voice. It is not only about what is said but also what is not being said. If we go back to systems and accessing services, let us say a caseworker speaks to a person who does not speak English or who has recently arrived in Australia, in the same way they will speak to someone who actually understands the system. They're throwing around words with the assumption that people understand the context.

We discussed the sense of impotence or lack of power, to have someone who does understand you or refuses to translate for you.

Blossom:

I'm thinking about how interpreters might say to their clients, "I'm going to say what you said, but in slightly different words, because I do not feel comfortable with that." When people access interpreters, they have been told that this service guarantees the fact that you are able to communicate to the doctor. But then some interpreters might choose not to interpret in the case of delicate health issues, or mental health issues, because of their own bias.

Paige:

We're not going to sugarcoat it, disguise it, or romanticise it. It happened to me many times that the interpreter would say to me, "I cannot say it in those exact words, but I'll say something similar to what you are saying." But why? And I would ask, "Why cannot you say it with the same words?" And you feel powerless, realising that your message will not reach the way you want it to.

If I need an interpreter, it's not for my amusement or just so someone can repeat what the doctor is saying so I can kind of understand. I have the right to be respected and to be heard exactly as I want to be heard.

As Paige discusses above, our insistence for language justice must be through the promotion of equity in language access by addressing systemic barriers, biases against LGBTIQ+ people, and power imbalances. Through language justice, we must affirm people's linguistic and cultural identity in order to foster inclusive participation in social, political, and institutional spaces (Polanco, 2016; Patankar and De Padua, 2024).

Discussion: queering solidarities through intersectionality

"We're going to use this as a bridge, so it does not happen to other people."

In this paper, we are particularly interested in the specific challenges that LFDP face once they have arrived in Australia, and are accessing mental health services, assistance with housing, education, and employment. In our conversations, it was suggested that a different approach needs to be taken when working with LFDP: the traditional approach of booking any interpreter who speaks the community member's language can present many challenges. At the least, community members can feel unheard, and misunderstood. At worst, prejudice and judgments can cause significant, long-lasting wounds and compromise LFDP's access to vital support and participation in civil life (Murray, 2016). In the Australian context, there is the ability to request a female interpreter through the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National), an interpreting service provided by the Department of Home Affairs (2023) for people with limited English proficiency and for agencies and businesses that need to communicate with their non-English speaking clients. There is not, however, an option to request an LGBTIQ+ person, an issue which has many complexities including the need for the language service provider to be "out" (Jones, 2020; Hammoud-Beckett, 2007). What if we were responsive to the specific, and diverse challenges faced by LGBTIQ+ people when working with language services? What if we were inspired by the tenets of solidarity and allyship?

The practice of queering solidarity and allyship¹² between LFDP and community interpreters could be perceived as the antithesis of the AUSIT code of ethics¹³ (Baldo, 2021; AUSIT, 2012). Often, the institutions within which interpreting takes place, such as healthcare centres, courts, and immigration offices, portray themselves as neutral,

and interpreters are expected to abide by this. We discussed the impact of strictly abiding by the code of ethics as an interpreter (Cronin, 2021).

Paige:

I ask myself: Did I have issues with the interpreting profession itself, or did I just not find the right person who could truly support me, who could take a fully human approach and say, "this person needs help—I'm going to set aside my code of ethics for a moment"? Because I, too, have followed ethical codes throughout my life and in my profession... There is a problem, and a solution must be found. Why aren't people accessing the service, why aren't they seeking it out, and what solutions can be offered? If they care about the code of ethics, they should also care about how well the service is functioning.

Mikhael:

We always assume that the system is the one that is silencing the interpreter, but do not forget that the interpreter can bring their own bias and can exert violence themselves and be an agent of the English-dominant Western system. The interpreter controls what gets said and what does not.

As an interpreter, you recognise the need of the person and you go about describing it to the service provider.

You know how the system needs to administer help. But often, that person is not aware of the system, so they end up missing each other, and you end up with bad settlement outcomes for refugees and asylum seekers. They are a plug and a wall socket, and you are meant to be the hands bringing them together, but actually, the system is not letting you bring them together. This is all further exacerbated if you are queer, your needs and your problems need to be addressed in a very delicate way. Interpreters are not trained well to recognise moments of transgression or violence because they might have only done a two-hour workshop on LGBTIQ+ inclusiveness. With no lived experience, you end up with an ineffective system that cannot deal with the problem and its many layers.

Paige:

I was reflecting and weighing things, wondering how not to come off as too aggressive when commenting—because I cannot see myself as being as violent as the passive violence I've received. I cannot justify having had 10 interpreters when only one met my expectations by showing empathy and affirming my rights to be heard and to justice. I do not want to sound too harsh, but that is the reality. And no matter how harsh, the truth must be told. I'm a very strong woman. I'm going to use this as a tool and I'm going to become the bridge, so it does not happen to other women after me, you know?

Allyship presents a potential lens through which to develop a nuanced and flexible understanding of the community interpreter's role, as well as culturally grounded redefinitions of ethicality and professionalism in the field (Marianacci, 2024). Allyship presents an

12 In our conversations for this paper, we discussed the variety of practices we have taken up as interpreters to express solidarity and allyship with LGBTIQ+ people we are interpreting for. Frankie asked the group, *what are our guiding stars when we step outside of our roles, or when we step into solidarity?* Mikhael spoke about knowing that the client was queer and sharing his queerness, which resulted in a connection further than the service provision, where they asked for guidance in accessing other services or help finding community. Mikhael said that often LGBTIQ+ forcibly displaced people do not trust that having an interpreter will be a safe communication method (Personal Communication, 2025). Paige, the community said that if an interpreter were to come out as a fellow LGBTIQ+ person it would "open up a space to build respect and trust," because the interpreter might understand a little about what queer people experience (Person Communication, 2025). Blossom reflected that she has been encouraged by other feminist interpreters to show solidarity through body language, such as putting your hand on my heart, to show "I'm interpreting, but I'm also deeply moved" (Olga García-Caro, Personal Communication, 2025).

13 The AUSIT code of ethics defines the "values and principles guiding the decisions interpreting and translating professionals make in practice" (2017: 4). Impartiality is a principle that mandates interpreters and translators to observe in all professional contacts. Interpreters remain "unbiased throughout the communication exchanged between the participants in any interpreted encounter" (4). However, as Biagini et al. (2017) describe, neutrality can paradoxically perpetuate injustice by failing to address power imbalances in interpreting contexts. Even so, there are many contexts where it is vital for interpreters to remain impartial, or to withhold their own prejudice, particularly if they carry biased judgements about LGBTIQ+ and their decisions around relationships or sexuality, for example.

opportunity for human connection as a means of ensuring care and support that addresses the needs of LGBTIQ+ people. Although for some language practitioners, inviting solidarity into the context of “professional” work might seem to overstep their role boundaries, considerations of their true role and mission within each context must be examined. Despite the ongoing discourse around the role of interpreters within linguistic interactions, a clear goal is irrefutable; the person-specific, linguistic and para-linguistic empowerment, affirmation and support of community members is of paramount importance. Otherwise, there is a risk of a homogenising approach that flattens and disregards the unique needs of each community member, leading to distrust and fear of using interpreting services.

Whilst some interpreters may share the lived experiences of being forcibly displaced from their country of origin (due to war, persecution, or violence), many do not share the experiences of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression and sex characteristics. The solidarity that arises from an interpreter’s support and understanding of LGBTIQ+ lives manifests in a sense of comfort, safety and personal validation. Hence, we stress the importance of language practitioners who have respect and knowledge of the localised histories and diverse lived experiences of LFDPs. We discussed how interpreters express solidarity with LGBTIQ+ community members.

Mikhael:

When I know the client is queer and they did not know that I was queer as well, I felt the urge or the desire to tell them that I am queer as well. Each time, I’ve noticed that it has made them feel more comfortable, and it has also resulted in a connection for us that enriched the service provision space. Often LGBTIQ+ forcibly displaced people do not trust that having an interpreter will be a safe communication method. They fear being discriminated against, misgendered, outed, or their integrity violated.

Frankie:

For you, Paige, how have you noticed Blossom express her solidarity?

Paige:

The body language of the interpreter and them using the right gendered pronouns says a lot. [To Blossom] do you remember when I was moving house, I was buying my furniture, and you were also buying your furniture? You said, “I do not want to interfere, but I just ordered a bed, and here’s the one I chose.” Little things like that made me feel at ease.

We shared a hug—it meant so much to me because, at that moment, I was going through a very depressive episode. Having someone hug me made me feel very vulnerable and brought me to tears. I felt like I was receiving the affection I needed. That made me feel truly comfortable. It felt so natural in the moment because, as individuals, we do not always know or have the capacity to fully understand another person’s emotional situation. But it felt so comfortable, so reassuring.

Frankie:

We are interested in the difference between the lived experience of solidarity, and lack thereof, aren’t we? So can I ask, when we step out of these taken for granted ideas, about how we are trained as interpreters, or what our code of ethics schools us into, what are our guiding stars?

If we are queering the solidarities between interpreter, service providers and community members, we are doing something different, aren’t we. What guides us?

Mikhael:

I feel like what guides me are a few different things. One of them is the idea that if I was not in the room, and the person spoke English fluently or if English was their first language, what would be communicated, or understood? When both people speak the same language, they understand more nuances. When I am interpreting, there’s a nuance that I understand because I speak English fluently, but the client will not, and no matter how good of an interpreter I am, sometimes that nuance does not come across. I think this goes beyond the accuracy of word for word and the transfer of meaning. It’s more than that. It is something a bit deeper than that, understanding the intentions behind questions.

Blossom:

Teachers such as Olga García-Caro have encouraged me to step out of my role in ways that are supportive to the person I am interpreting for. I think of family violence counsellors who have given me permission to participate in a more therapeutic way. In the feminist round table (Susam-Saraeva et al., 2023), they speak about not ignoring the feelings that come up in you when you are listening to someone’s story. A gesture like putting your hand on your heart can let people know, “I’m interpreting, I’m listening, and I am deeply moved by the act of getting to witness, or to hear your story.”

The practice of shifting the perspective of interpreters from tools to collaborators in service provision and witnesses to community members’ experiences allows for an alliance of solidarity that can achieve the most “just practices” possible for LFDPs (Santhanam–Martin, Personal Communication, 2024).

Conclusion

Through conversations between a community representative, interpreters and a service provider, we propose a reexamination of the current application of language services for LFDP as proposed by the AUSIT Code of Ethics in Australia. Aware that considerations of intersectionality are at the core of achieving best outcomes for LFDP, we highlight that mere message transfer is insufficient in the context of identities and experiences that are stigmatised and discriminated against. We emphasise the need for community interpreters to commit to more meaningful and localised engagement with the

histories and lived experiences of LGBTIQ+ people who are settling in their host countries. For example, understanding how transmisogyny affects the lives of trans women or how criminalisation of queerness has shaped identities. We also advocate for LGBTIQ+ forcibly displaced people to join the interpreter profession to uplift and reaffirm the value of lived experience in providing culturally affirming support. The findings from our conversations suggest that allyship and solidarity are vital in safeguarding the integrity, wellbeing, and mental health of LFDP within their settlement process in their host country.

Data availability statement

The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Ethics statement

Written informed consent was obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article.

Author contributions

MT: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. FH-S: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. BA: Data curation, Methodology,

Conceptualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. PM: Writing – original draft, Methodology, Conceptualization. MQ: Writing – original draft, Methodology, Conceptualization.

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