



Reflections on interpreting settings and ethics in view of visual representations of *la Malinche*

Krisztina Zimányi
Universidad de Guanajuato, Mexico
krisztina.gto@gmail.com

DOI: 10.12807/ti.107202.2015.a01

Abstract: During the conquest of the territory of today's Mexico, a young indigenous woman, mostly known as *la Malinche*, emerged as the main interpreter, and later lover, to the Spanish Conquistador, Hernán Cortés. Numerous written references and pictorial representations attest to her linguistic, communication and diplomatic skills, and they also reveal a fascination with her private affairs. This article applies 21st century conceptualisation and terminology to analyse the kind of interpreting she practised and to evaluate her professional performance from an ethics perspective. By examining both contemporary and subsequent illustrations that depict her in a professional or personal capacity, the study comes to a number of interesting conclusions. First, the kind of interpreting in which *la Malinche* could best be described as 'interpreting in conflict zones.' Second, the iconography of interpreting displays a series of recurring motifs. Third, there seems to be a distinction between the focus in contemporary and retrospective images along the lines of skills versus ethical guidelines. Finally, this idiosyncrasy could serve as a valuable lesson for today's interpreters.

Keywords: interpreting, ethics, visual arts, *la Malinche*, New Spain

Introduction

Most images, written or pictorial, respond to previous stereotypes. This is particularly true of images created at the beginning of the contacts between Europeans and peoples from other cultures.
(Alonso Arraguás & Baigorri Jalón, 2004, p.130)

This article aims to consider certain aspects of interpreting ethics against the backdrop of some visual representations of *la Malinche*¹ across the centuries. While these musings are not the first of their kind either in terms of interpreting role descriptions and ethical considerations (Hale, 2007; Pym, 2001; Roberts,

¹ A number of academic sources (Flores Farfán, 2002; Karttunen, 1994) discuss the origins of her probable birth name, *Malinalli*, which in Nahuatl refers either to a bunch of grass or to the day of the month she was born. There seems to be consensus that she was baptised *Marina* on her conversion to Christianity, which took place near the sea. Thereon, she was referred to as *Doña Marina* among Spanish-speakers. It is the corruption of her Christian name among the indigenous population, with the addition of the female endearing suffix *-tzín*, that led to the appellation *Malintzín*. In turn, this version was "re-Hispanicised" as *Malinche*. For its prevalence in the T/IS literature, this last designation is used in this article. Furthermore, this version gave rise to the concept of *Malinchismo*, or the preference for anything foreign over Mexican resources, be they human or otherwise, which still permeates Mexican culture, originating in the notion that *la Malinche* 'sold out' the indigenous population while interpreting for the Conquistador.

1997), or the analysis of la Malinche's role in the conquest of New Spain (Glantz 2001c; Karttunen, 1994; Nava Sánchez, 2001; Yannakakis, 2006), or even contemplating visual art works in the interpreting context with reference to la Malinche (Alonso Araguás & Baigorri Jalón, 2004; Brotherson, 2001; Slautina, 2007), it hopes to contribute to the existing literature in a refreshing way. Following an attempt at classifying the type of interpreting once carried out by this historical figure, I will discuss the three pillars of interpreting ethics, namely, impartiality, neutrality and confidentiality in relation to her persona. The conceptualisation will be aided by highlighting recurring motifs in the artistic depictions of la Malinche, ranging in time scale from codices scripted at the time of the Conquest through Romantic paintings and works by Mexican muralists in the twentieth century to current imaginings. The pieces have been selected from a rather eclectic array of art works on the basis of their relevance to the argument presented², and, thus, will appear in a thematic rather than a chronological order, given that the focus here is on the interpreter's role and position rather than on an art historian's perspective.

1. Taxonomical difficulties

Although, apart from the date and circumstances of her death, la Malinche's biographical details are not exactly shrouded in mystery, they cannot be corroborated entirely, either. What is known is that she was born to an Aztec family and once her father, a *cacique*, or community leader, had died, she was most probably sold to some traders from Xicalango who passed her on to a Mayan community of Tabascans. This series of changing of hands led to her learning not only Nahuatl and Maya but also their various dialects. This later on raised her to the ranks of an interpreter when presented as one of the twenty young women who were part of an offering levied upon the Chontal Maya by the victorious Spaniards in April of 1519. According to contemporary sources (Díaz del Castillo, 1966 [1555]), she literally emerged from among the other women and began interpreting between Maya and Nahuatl. From there on, she became the interpreter, intercultural guide and probably informer to the Spanish colonisers in general, and Hernán Cortés's lover in particular. As these two aspects are intrinsically linked, they will both feature in the following visual analysis of her role.

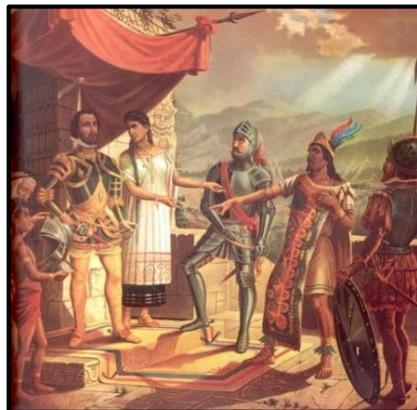


Figure 1. *War and social upheaval*

At first sight, it appears difficult to determine whether la Malinche was more akin to today's conference or community interpreters. On viewing the painting in Figure 1 (Historical Boys' Clothes, 2004/2013), for example, la Malinche is seen interpreting between Cortés, the representative of the Spanish Crown, and Moctezuma II, the Aztec ruler, which would suggest interpreting in high diplomatic circles. Today, such activities are carried out by conference interpreters rather than community interpreters. On the other hand, the variety of settings and, above all, the bidirectional nature of the linguistic transfer would suggest a closer relationship with a community interpreter's work. Therefore, in order to

² As a result, a number of paintings have had to have been excluded, such as *La Malinche* by Alfredo Arreguín (1993) or Diego Rivera's mural in the Palacio Nacional in Mexico City.

avoid confusion, I will begin with examining a number of factors that are traditionally considered when establishing this classical divide, and then offer another categorisation that may prove useful in the circumstances before moving on to the discussion of ethical concerns.

1.1 Conference vs. community interpreting

I would argue that Pöchhacker’s “conceptual spectrum of interpreting” (2004, p.17) with reference to “settings and constellations” provides a helpful starting point and, accordingly, will discuss the matter in terms of (1) the number of parties involved; (2) the professional role of the primary participants; (3) power relations between the primary participants; (4) the number of speakers and listeners; and, (5) directionality.

1.1.1 The number of parties involved.

Pöchhacker (2004, pp.13-17) suggests that interpreting in international and / or conference settings may be more likely to involve multilateral communication, while in the community sphere interpreting generally takes place between two parties. Given the multi-ethnic and



Figure 2. Florentine Codex (12: fo.14)

multilingual nature of contemporary reality in the territory that was to become New Spain, it would be difficult to fathom that multilateral encounters did not take place during the Conquest. Nevertheless, la Malinche is consistently depicted as an interpreter between two, and only two, parties, as, for example, in Figure 2 (Sahagún, 1577 Book 12, folio 14) from *The general history of the things of New Spain*, also known as the *Florentine Codex*. In this sense, la Malinche’s interpreting activities tend to resemble the community interpreting setting more than a conference interpreting environment.

1.1.2 The professional background of the primary participants.

In contrast, regarding the professional background of the participants, la Malinche would probably qualify as a conference interpreter today. As mentioned in relation to Figure 1. above, the primary speakers for whom la Malinche interpreted were mostly dignitaries on both the indigenous and the Spanish sides. Whether of royal blood and chosen to rule, as in the case of Moctezuma II, or of noble lineage and entrusted by his king as is the case with Cortés, there is no doubt that they both represented what today would be considered as highly powerful positions both in political and professional terms.

1.1.3 Power relations between the participants.

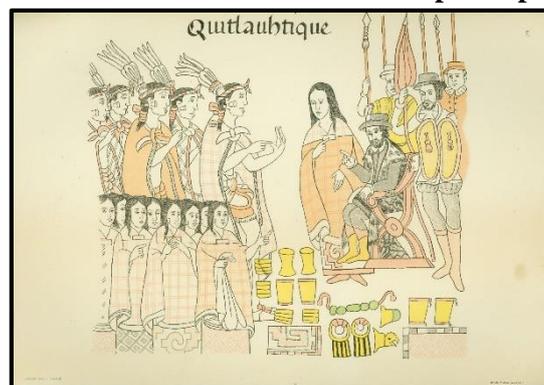


Figure 3. Lienzo de Tlaxcala: Quiatlauhtique

The relative position held in their respective societies would indicate an equal standing between the Spanish conquistadors and their leaders, on the one hand, and the indigenous population and their chiefs, on the other. However, the defeat of the locals by the colonisers resulted in a power imbalance illustrated in Figure 3 from the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* (Palace of

the Governors, 2002-2009a). Here Moctezuma II presents the *quitlauhtique*, or welcoming offerings, to Cortés who is seated as if to confirm his superiority (Barton Kranz, 2007, p.8). Although unequal power relations are a feature more closely associated with community than conference interpreting, it is not unheard of in the latter settings, either.

1.1.4 The number of speakers and listeners.

If the professional background or the relative power of the participants does not help decide whether the interpreting at hand is closer to conference or community interpreting, the number of speakers or listeners will not provide the solution, either. Pöchhacker (2004, p.17) suggests that a single speaker addressing a multiple audience may be more characteristic of the former, while face-to-face, or one-to-one, communication is more typical of the latter. However, judging by contemporary illustrations, la Malinche engaged in a variety of situations with regard to the number of participants on each side.

For example, in Figure 4 (Sahagún, 1577 Book 12, folio 26), she is in the line of verbal fire between a group of Spanish soldiers and representatives of the Aztec nobility, with more than one speaker-listener on each side. The activity of speaking is visualised by a glyph or pictogram of a curlicue speech sign, or speech scroll called *tlatolli*. It resembles a tongue and signifies verbal interaction mostly between speakers of a noble origin. Here it is drawn on both sides of the Malinche's figure in the centre of the image. In this scenario, based on the number of participants, the setting could be identified as inter-social, leaning towards the conference interpreting end of the spectrum.

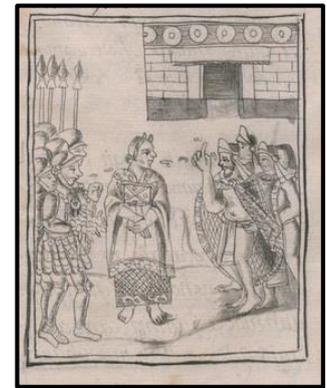


Figure 4. Florentine Codex (12: fo.26)



Figure 5. Florentine Codex (12: fo.29)

In comparison with the group picture, the image in Figure 5 (Sahagún, 1577 Book 12, folio 29) captures a one-to-one conversation facilitated by la Malinche as the interpreter. It shows both the speech scroll as well as the elevated hand with the index finger pointing in the recipient's or listener's direction. Thus, based on this illustration, we could argue that la Malinche is engaged in community interpreting practice. This could also be supported by the power difference between the primary speakers made apparent by their relative positioning, with Cortés taking the upper level.

As Pöchhacker also comments (2004, p. 17), the division between the two types of settings is not clear-cut. Conference interpreters may interpret between two heads of state with only the three persons, and perhaps security present. Similarly, a community interpreting situation may involve a medical service provider, a patient and his/her family members. Thus, the classification as to the type of interpreting practiced by la Malinche remains inconclusive. Let us consider if the answer lies in the directionality of the interpreting activity.

1.1.5 Directionality.

In contrast with conference interpreters, community interpreters generally work in a bidirectional or dialogic manner (c.f. Ozolins, 2007; Pöchhacker, 1999; Rudvin, 2007; Vargas, 2012). In la Malinche's case, at first this meant interpreting between her mother tongue, Nahuatl, which she learnt as a child,

and Maya, whose dialects she acquired as an adolescent, once sold to traders from Tabasco by her mother (c.f. Bastin, 2004; Díaz del Castillo, 1966 [1555]; Flores Farfán, 2002). Later on, once she had also learnt Spanish, she worked in any combination involving these three languages and their respective dialects such as Chontla Mayan or Mayan from the Yucatan.

Interestingly, at first la Malinche worked in relay with Jerónimo de Aguilar, a missionary who had survived a shipwreck about a decade earlier and learnt Mayan as a captive. Thus, she interpreted from Nahuatl to Mayan and then Aguilar took over from Mayan to Spanish and then they repeated the chain in reverse. The only known representation of this procedure can be found in the Lienzo de Tlaxcala (California State University, n.d.), a contemporary manuscript, where la Malinche and Aguilar are depicted in the line below the two negotiating figures of Moctezuma II and Cortés (Figure 6)³. While the relay mode is in use both in conference and in community settings, the bidirectional nature of la Malinche's work would indicate that it is closer to community than conference interpreting.

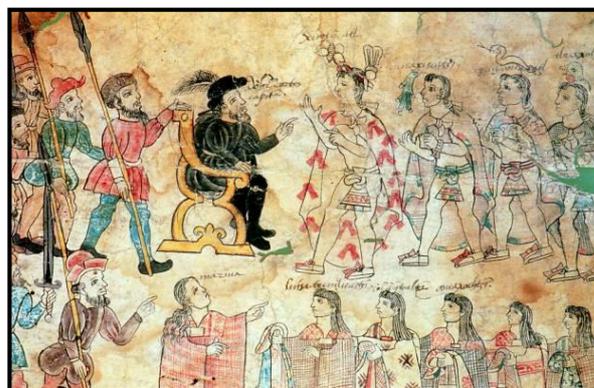


Figure 6. La Malinche and Aguilar in relay

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1.2 Further considerations

Even if we regard the conference – community interpreting divide as a continuum, rather than two mutually exclusive settings, the analysis of Pöchhacker's conceptual spectrum has not yielded conclusive evidence as to the type of interpreting involved in la Malinche's case. It appears that further reflection is called for, this time with a focus on the interpreter rather than on the interpreted event. In particular, I will discuss the interpreter's ethnic-linguistic background, training and remuneration.

1.2.1 Ethnic-linguistic background.



Figure 7. Ramos Martínez

Traditionally, conference interpreters work in the official languages of a country or an international organisation. The United Nations operates in only six languages, while the European Union caters for 24 languages. However, as Baylav *et al.* comment, "it is well known that in most European countries hundreds of different languages are spoken by people of various different ethnic groups" (2007, p. 4). Those members of these ethnic groups who do not speak any official language of the country where they reside face difficulties in accessing public services, a situation that can only be remedied by the use of community interpreters.

As the probability that someone from outside the ethnic community would speak their language or dialect to act as an interpreter is quite slim, it naturally

³ It is perhaps worth mentioning that la Malinche is positioned in front of Aguilar, although this may be due to the interpreting order, and her proximity to the Nahuatl-speaking people portrayed, rather than owing to her supposed significance over Aguilar himself.

follows that the interpreters come from a ‘native-speaking’ background, be they from an indigenous, immigrant or deaf community. In illustrations contemporary or almost contemporary to la Malinche herself, her ethnic background is usually implied by her attire, as discussed in section 2.1.1. In later depictions, however, albeit not necessarily in an interpreting setting, there is a greater emphasis on other features. Alfredo Ramos Martínez’s portrait (ca. 1930) in Figure 7, exhibited in the Phoenix Art Museum, for example, displays a darker skin tone, indigenous facial structure and the traditional hair braids. In this respect, la Malinche shares more with today’s community interpreters than with the conference interpreters who would not be versed in the vernacular(s).

1.2.1 Interpreter training.

In a similar vein, we could argue that the spontaneous nature of her first recorded interpreting, described in the introduction to Section 1 on taxonomical difficulties, would be more easily associated with community interpreting than with conference interpreting. Not only did she acquire Mayan as a second language independently, she was also self-trained, became an



Figure 8. Florentine Codex (12: fo.44)

interpreter by chance and interpreted in an ad hoc manner as the need arose (c.f. Ozolins, 2000). Thus, she could be described as the epitome of the ‘natural interpreter,’ a term coined by Brian Harris (Harris, 1976, 2012; Harris & Sherwood, 1978), or regarded as a language broker from an early age (Antonini, 2010; Faulstich Orellana, 2009; Morales & Hanson, 2005).

In addition, it could also be argued that her role is closer to that of an ‘intercultural mediator’ than that of an interpreter (Martin & Martí, 2008; Pöchhacker, 2008; Rudvin, 2007; Rudvin & Tomassini, 2008; Verrept, 2008). The differences in attire, positioning and gestures, for example, in Figure 8, all suggest distinctive cultural backgrounds and communicative styles between the primary speakers that are apparently being successfully mediated by la Malinche. She seems to be embracing both worlds by wearing a traditional dress while positioning herself with the Spaniards, a duality further discussed in Sections 2.1.1-2.1.4. While such considerations fall outside the scope of the current article, even the fact that the discussion can arise seems to suggest that the type of interpreting in question is closer to the community-based end of the spectrum than to the conference interpreting opposite.

1.2.3 Remuneration.

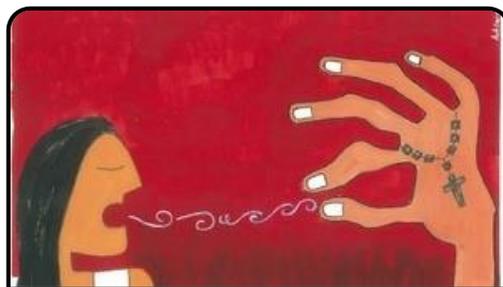


Figure 9. La lengua

Throughout the second half of the last century conference interpreters fought for proper working conditions, including payment, while their community interpreting colleagues, often including qualified and certified

One of the most contested issues with regard to the professionalisation of interpreters (see for example, Furmanek, 2012; Pöchhacker, 1999; Wadensjö, Dimitrova & Nilsson, 2007), and perhaps the most tangible distinction between conference and community interpreters, is the question of

court and medical interpreters, are lagging behind in becoming recognised and appropriately recompensed.

Payment was viewed differently during the time of the Conquest and shortly after, and was likely regarded as a reward or compensation. Although la Malinche enjoyed benefits that went beyond wage or stipend, her situation could not be entirely compared to that of today's conference interpreter. Like other interpreters (Echevarría, 2001; Glantz, 2001a, 2001b), she was regarded as a mouthpiece and went by the denomination *la lengua* or 'the tongue,' a metonymic expression designating the interpreting profession (Bastin, 2004). The essence of her contribution to the colonising and evangelising efforts is beautifully captured in Adriana Canteros's watercolour (2009) in Figure 9, using part-for-whole images of a hand adorned with rosary beads and a cross pulling out the tongue, or the speech scrolls from la Malinche's mouth.

1.3 Possible classification: interpreting in conflict zones

As we have seen so far, applying current terminology to practices of half a millennium ago does not prove an easy task, yet the reason for completing such an exercise is primarily to give a historic perspective to our understanding of the development of interpreting as known today. We can also observe that la Malinche was not unique in her professional endeavours at the time and there are other documented near-contemporaries or at least fellow interpreters working in similar situations during colonisation across the globe.

Among these, Pocahontas has risen to Disney fame; Juan González, Ponce de León's interpreter, has given his name to a mountain in Puerto Rico; and *Felipillo* has notoriously lent his name to referring to corrupt politicians (c.f. Alonso Araguás & Baigorri Jalón, 2004; Bastin, 2004; Karttunen, 1994; Kurz, 1991; Yannakakis, 2006). These historical figures were the predecessors of a long line of interpreters who have worked and continue to work in difficult conditions during moments of military and cultural conflict.

Although Pöschhacker mentions military, warfare and diplomatic variants among the inter-social settings where interpreting may take place (2004, p. 15), in view of recent research developments and publications it appears that the term 'interpreting in conflict zones' (Baker, 2006; Carr, 2007; Fernández-Ocampo & Wolf, 2014; Footitt et al., 2012) would be the most appropriate terminology. It encompasses a variety of settings ranging from negotiations through religious events to actual military encounters, where interpreters may find themselves in the middle of conflict and confusion, as was la Malinche, identifiable by her braids, in the bottom left corner of this chaotic illustration in Figure 10.



Figure 10. Florentine Codex (12: fo.43)

2. Ethical issues in interpreting in conflict zones

Having defined the type of interpreting provided by la Malinche, I will now move on to examine how her performance and the visual representations of her historic persona map onto the three pillars of interpreting ethics. Given the strategic position she found herself in, and the potential danger these encounters entailed, codes of ethics as well as common sense would dictate adhering to the requirements regarding impartiality, neutrality and confidentiality. However, as we will see in the illustrations, nowadays la Malinche could be barred from a modern professional association on a number of counts.

2.1 Impartiality

Within the first decade after the arrival of Cortés's troops, the work of the interpreters in New Spain was regulated by the Spanish Crown. The first decree was signed in 1529 and by 1563 the interpreters had received professional status with fixed rates (Bastin, 2004, p. 508), similar to the assignment-invoice based remuneration system familiar to freelance interpreters today. Among other aspects, there were rules about quality, accuracy and impartiality or the duty "to interpret clearly and openly, without omission or addition, without bias" (Catelli & Gargatagli, 1998 quoted in Bastin, 2004, p.508). Furthermore, in order to ensure that the message was not distorted against their interests, the Spaniards often employed two interpreters at the same time to corroborate their versions (Murillo Gallegos, 2009). Given that impartiality continues to be one of the fundamentals of interpreting ethics, this section is dedicated to a number of components that can be visually interpreted in the depictions of la Malinche, including her attire, size and position relative to the other participants as well as to the communication channels used.

2.1.1. Attire.



Figure 11. Lienzo de Traxcala: Offerings at Tlaxcala

Based on her attire, la Malinche is identified as *la india*, or as the indigenous woman from the early representations onwards. Shown in Figure 11, in a detail depicting offerings by the inhabitants of Tlaxcala to Cortés (Palace of the Governors, 2002-2009b), she appears wearing the *huipil*, a cape or gown made of traditional textile, with indigenous colouring. Sometimes she is also shown wearing a *rebozo*, or shawl, common among Mexican women

even today. In this sense, she is clearly considered a member of the local community, however complex that community may be (Gonzalbo Aizpuru, 2001).

2.1.2 Size.

It is important to note that in the contemporary illustrations la Malinche is at least equal in size to the primary speakers, if not larger, with spatial perspectives taken into account. Such visibility is rarely granted to interpreters today. For example, in the image in Figure 12 (Palace of the Governors, 2002-2009c), showing negotiations between Moctezuma II and Cortés before the battle of Tenochtitlán, la

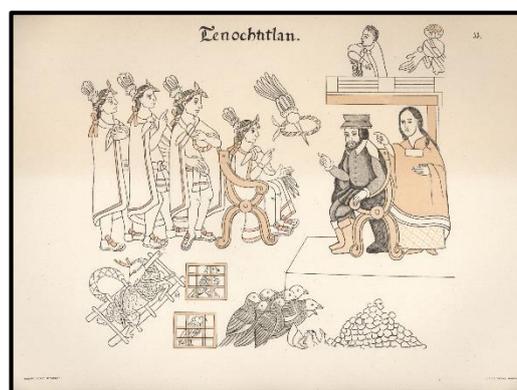


Figure 12. Lienzo de Traxcala: Tenochtitlán

Malinche's standing figure is just a little larger than that of the seated Spaniard. While Arencibia (1998, pp.92-93, cited in Alonso Araguás and Baigorri Jalón, 2004, p.132) points out that la Malinche is normally portrayed larger than other indigenous characters in the images, Alonso Araguás and Baigorri Jalón (2004, p.132) go so far as to say that this reflects the contemporary historiographers' attempt to provide the victors', i.e. the Spaniards', official version by

highlighting the personalities key to their successful conquest in their chronicles.

2.1.3 Position.



Figure 13. Cueva del Río

In Cueva del Río's work (1969) in Figure 13, la Malinche appears by Cortés's side as if to signal her alignment with the Spanish leader. Although here the fire snake enveloping Cortés's figure symbolises the belief that he was the reincarnation of Quetzalcóatl, the Aztec deity of the feathered serpent whose second coming was to be welcomed, not much has changed since the 16th century depictions regarding la Malinche herself. In other words, she is clad in a traditional dress, stands behind the Conquistador with whom she is equal in size, and is shown with the speech scroll and the pointed index finger directed towards the Aztec king who stands over his doomed city of Tenochtitlán. The only aspect that seems to have been altered in this portrayal by the artist is that the spectator is invited into Cortés's viewpoint in actual visual terms, as if having joined his ranks.

2.1.4 Channels of communication.

As remarked in Sections 1.1.4 and 1.2.3 above, the two primary ways to visualise speech is through the inclusion of the "tongue" glyph and the use of the hands with the index finger pointing in the direction of speech. In addition, the illustrators also seem to have utilised gaze as a display of open communication channels. Once again, in the image in Figure 14, while wearing a *huipil*, la Malinche is to be found on Cortés's side, as if to create a balance between her two allegiances. Furthermore, while she is in conversation with the representatives of Tepetzotlán, as shown by the speech scroll between the two speakers, she is also transferring messages between Cortés and the Aztec leader, as indicated by her two hands pointing at the two primary speakers. As the two-dimensional image cannot display temporality, we can only speculate as to the simultaneous or consecutive nature of these two speech activities. Nevertheless, the bilateral directionality of the activity cannot be questioned.



Figure 14. Florentine Codex (12: fo.47 back)

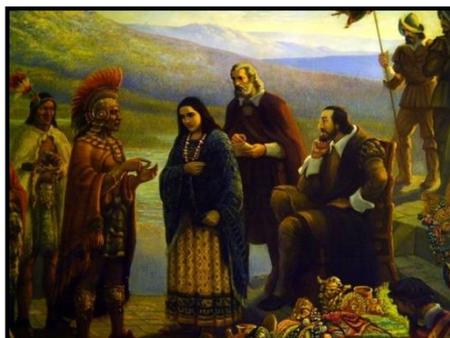


Figure 15. Luján Mora

In an interesting artistic afterthought, the gesture of the pointed index finger is somewhat reinterpreted in a later work of art by Luján Mora (2009), seen at the Exhacienda de San Antonio de Chautla in San Martín, Texmelucan. In the mural reproduced in Figure 15, la Malinche is depicted as a more servile interpreter, with a downward gaze, as if sent forward by the Conquistador. Cortés himself is seated on top of the offerings merely listening to the

standing figure of a local chief or king, probably Moctezuma. In this case, the hand is shown in an ambiguous position, and could be construed as the sign of interpreting, but also as if la Malinche were holding on to her *rebozo*, in order to protect her fragile figure and identity.

Finally, la Malinche takes a central, though backstage, position in Desiderio Hernández Xochitiotzin's painting from 1979 (Figure 16) where there is no visual reference to her interpreting role, yet she appears in the intermediary stance almost overlooking the seemingly peaceful meeting between the indigenous and the colonising leaders. Unlike the Chautla mural, here the three figures are represented equal in size, at a mutual equidistance from one another, and there is no indication that she would be serving either side.



Figure 16. Hernández Xochitiotzin

In fact, she is very much present in her own right, not a mere onlooker, rather an overseer of what was to become a historical occasion. The two undeniable facts are that a) this is a unique representation where the heralded equilateral triangle, that is, the true triadic relationship (c.f. Wadensjö, 2001, 2004), between the two primary speakers and the mediator is considered; and b) there are no attributes that would identify her as an interpreter. This may indicate that rarely does the ideal become reality. The reason as to why la Malinche is not visually associated as the perfect interpreter may lie in her rather personal relationship with Cortés, as discussed in the following section.

2.2 Neutrality



Figure 17. Jesús de la Helguera

La Malinche's personal involvement with her 'employer' or 'contractor' would clearly present a conflict of interests in the interpreting practices of today. The image of a seductress, innocent though she may be meant to appear in Jesús de la Helguera's 1941 painting in Figure 17, does not provide a helpful reference on a professional CV (c.f. Dragoje &

Ellam, 2007). On the contrary, any kind of private relationship, amorous or otherwise, with either service user or service provider, would have to be immediately disclosed to both parties, and a new interpreter would have to be called.

When portrayed alone, or outside her interpreter role, la Malinche's femininity is often exaggerated and presented from a romanticised or exotic perspective, as in Armando Drechsler's (1936) 'calendar girl' image depicting Anna May Wong as the historical figure in Figure 18. She appears rather stylised without even the slightest allusion to her professional involvement. Furthermore, rather than the traditional *huipil* or *rebozo*, she is adorned with a jewellery and feathers that represent her identity in the eyes of the viewer rather than from an indigenous perspective. This approach is also characteristic of a number of illustrations where she appears as Cortés's lover.



Figure 18. Drechsler



Figure 19. Reynoso

The erotically-driven destructive force between the Conquistador and his interpreter–advisor is illustrated in Esmeralda Reynoso’s drypoint print (2013) in Figure 19. It juxtaposes the facial portraits of la Malinche in the top right corner and Catalina Suárez, the wife Cortés allegedly killed by choking her with her own pearl necklace (Thomas, 1993, pp.580-582), in the diagonal opposite. As far as contextualisation is concerned, the illustration makes no reference at all to la Malinche’s involvement as an interpreter. However, it alludes to the cruelty of the Church in the cross-headed dagger slaying the apparently insignificant figures which probably represent the

indigenous population.

Significantly, while the contemporary illustrations seen in earlier sections emphasise her role as an interpreter and depict her in professional situations, more recent images display a fascination with la Malinche’s personal life. Some of these images are quite explicit and emphasise her vulnerability, as is the case with Raúl Anguiano Valadez’s painting (1953) in Figure 20, where a heavily armoured Cortés embraces the naked figure of la Malinche in a protective or patronising gesture. Although the depiction may seem extreme, projection of superiority–inferiority is not unheard of in community interpreting situations where the service provider often is the party who contracts the interpreter and who definitely enjoys a higher position in the prevalent power structure (see, for example, Inghilleri, 2005).



Figure 20. Anguiano Valadez



Figure 21. Orozco

The work titled “Cortés y la Malinche” (Figure 21) by the renowned Mexican muralist, José Clemente Orozco (1926) encapsulates a similar conceptualisation. Here the power relations are evident not only from the way Cortés’s extended left arm blocks (or protects?) the figure of a more enervated Malinche, but also from the gesture with which his left foot tramples on a young man, an allegory of the indigenous population whose face is invisible to the viewer (c.f. Taylor, 2006, p.830). Judging by the positioning of the three persons and their size, la Malinche somehow appears an accomplice in the oppression, albeit in tacit agreement.

Whether considered consensual or not, the union of Cortés and la Malinche has acquired a rather symbolic nature especially through the process of creating a national identity (Del Río, 2009; Paz, 1967; Serrano, 2012; Townsend, 2006) which positioned her in the foreground of a more modernist Mexican metanarrative. It is widely accepted that la Malinche bore a son, Martín, to Cortés. He is regarded as the first white-indigenous child, the first mestizo, a metaphor for an entire nation. This concept, and a loving family portrait (c.f. Wood, 2007, p.231) is visually foregrounded in Santa Contreras Barraza’s 1991 oil painting on metal (Figure 22). The painting, however, also

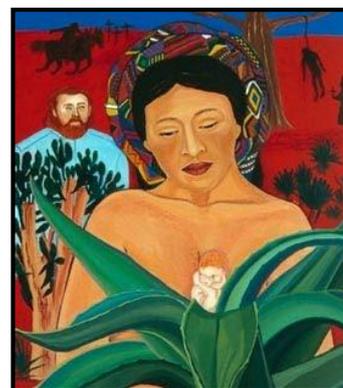


Figure 22. Barraza

encompasses the themes of violence as represented by the figures outlined against a bloodshed backdrop.

It is apparent that none of the images in this section are in any way related to interpreting. It is also obvious that la Malinche had the linguistic abilities and the interpreting skills to provide quality services, otherwise she would not have been hailed by her contemporaries and we would have no evidence, pictorial or otherwise, of her existence. However, for whatever reason, be it for her survival instinct or her ambition, her neutrality could not be preserved. This, in turn, also jeopardised confidentiality, as we shall see in the following section.

2.3 Confidentiality

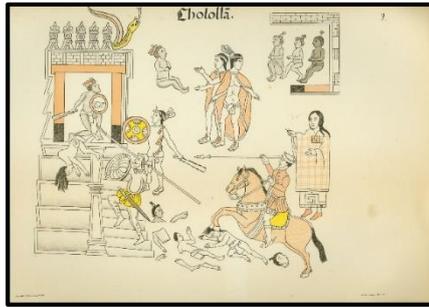


Figure 23. Lienzo de Tlaxcala: Cholula

Legend has it that la Malinche more than served the hand that fed her. It is said that, while Cortés's army was stationed outside the town of Cholula (Figure 23, Palace of the Governors, 2009), an elderly lady warned the young interpreter that the locals were planning to ambush the Spanish troops. If the old woman feared for la Malinche's life, she, in turn, was afraid for the Conquistador, and allegedly informed him of the impending

attack. In order to prevent losses, Cortés ordered the massacre of the Cholulan male population, resulting in the death of over 5,000 people.

Ever since the battle that took place on 18th October 1519, la Malinche is considered to have committed treason against the indigenous population, even if contemporary sources do not corroborate the same (Flores Farfán, 2002, p.128) and that the indigenous population was not homogenous in itself. For this reason, her name, in the form of the derivation "Malinchismo", today is associated with the concept of betrayal, and the preference for anything foreign.

This is also why the sleeping body of la Malinche in Figure 24 is troubled by nightmares in the painting by Antonio Ruiz (1939). Here the props turn into metaphors: the outline of her body becomes the landscape, supporting the still standing city of Cholula; her hips, a symbol of her femininity and the root of her betrayal, sustain the fortress that will fall; the crack in the wall seems like a rupture in the establishment and a lightning strike from the heavens is a punishment for her actions.



Figure 24. Ruiz

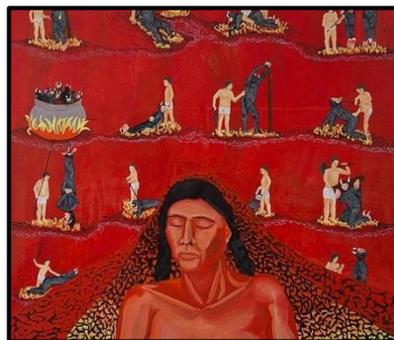


Figure 25. Uriegas

A whistleblower, a natural-born survivor, an indispensable tool in the conquest of New Spain, la Malinche lives on as the seller-out of her people in the popular imagination in Mexico. Her burden, the guilt from breaking unwritten ethical codes, weighs heavily on her mind, as depicted in Rafael Uriegas' (2011) strikingly scarlet-hued painting in Figure 25. Undoubtedly, she must have been a formidable interpreter who has captured both the artistic and the academic imagination.

Conclusion

During the course of this article we have identified the type of interpreting la Malinche provided as “interpreting in conflict zones.” We have also traced certain recurrent motifs in her representations as an interpreter, including the traditional attire she wears, which identifies her as *la india*; her positioning and size relative to the other participants in the images, which reflect her importance and alignment with the Spanish conquistadors; and a pictographic speech scroll or her hand gestures indicating channels of communication, which reveal her role as an interpreter. Finally, we have found that there seems to be a significant difference between the contemporary sources that focus on her role as an interpreter and later depictions that tend to display a fascination with her private life. This distinction perhaps holds the key to her legacy, and the lessons to be learnt, with regard to interpreting practices today, once we realise that technical skills and ethical considerations together are required from professional interpreters, regardless of the setting or type of interpreting, but especially in conflictual situations.

In brief, we can state that the quantity and quality of the visual representations of la Malinche’s life and work are in themselves astounding, and proof that an interpreter can make a mark on history. It is fascinating that, given the lack of recording opportunities at the time, the chroniclers deemed her role as an interpreter significant enough to commemorate this otherwise ephemeral activity in more enduring ways. We can conclude with a painting by the Argentinean Rosario Marquardt (1992) in Figure 26 that recaptures the curlicue speech scroll of traditional iconography on both sides of her double face, as if depicting her astonishing ability as an interpreter.

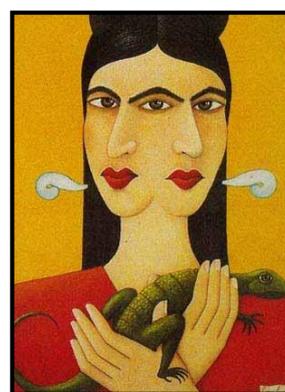


Figure 26. Marquardt

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