

## EMOTIONAL AND CULTURAL LOAD IN COMMUNITY INTERPRETING

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*The efficacy and ethics of contemporary community interpreting are increasingly challenged by high-stakes environments, forced migration, and global crises. This study investigates the emotional and cultural load experienced by community interpreters and analyzing how these complex factors influence professional sustainability and performance. The goal is to develop a framework that recognizes interpreter well-being as a prerequisite for ethical and effective practice. The investigation adopted an integrated analytical approach, synthesizing current theoretical approaches with empirical findings drawn from international and Ukrainian scholarship. The research was structured around defining and conceptualizing emotional and cultural load, examining their unique challenges in settings like military and medical contexts, and analyzing resilience mechanisms. The analysis confirms that the interpreter's burden operates as a triad: cognitive load, emotional load, and cultural load, forming a dynamic, mutually reinforcing system. The study proposes a Resilience- and Sustainability-Oriented Framework that expands current models by incorporating professional resilience (adaptive coping, boundary-setting) and sustainability structures (trauma-informed policies, institutional support). Institutional structures are vital for protecting interpreters' well-being. The ultimate conclusion is that effective and ethical community interpreting depends on recognizing interpreters as emotionally and cognitively engaged cultural mediators whose work necessitates trauma literacy, cultural intelligence, and supportive infrastructures. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to examine cumulative trauma and the evaluation of structured support systems, such as peer supervision models and trauma-informed training modules, to enhance professional viability.*

**Key words:** community interpreting, cultural mediation, intercultural competence, emotional load, cognitive load, resilience, sustainability.

**Поворознюк Р. В. Емоційне й культурне навантаження в громадському перекладі.** Ефективність та етичні засади сучасного громадського перекладу дедалі частіше випробовуються на витривалість стресовими умовами, вимушеною міграцією та глобальними кризами. Наше дослідження присвячене ролі емоційного й культурного навантаження, яке відчують на собі громадські перекладачі, та тому, як ці складні фактори впливають на професійну стійкість та ефективність. Метою дослідження є розробка рамкової структури, де благополуччя перекладача розглядається як передумова етичної та ефективної перекладацької діяльності. У дослідженні застосовано інтегрований аналіз, що поєднує сучасні теоретичні підходи з емпіричними висновками, отриманими з міжнародних та вітчизняних наукових досліджень. Дослідження концептуалізує емоційне й культурне навантаження, висвітлює унікальні виклики військового й медичного контексту та аналізує механізми стійкості громадського перекладача. Результати підтверджують, що професійне навантаження громадського перекладача функціонує у вигляді триади з когнітивного, емоційного й культурного складників, утворюючи динамічну, взаємодіювальну систему. Розроблено рамкову структуру, зорієнтовану на стійкість і сталість, яка удосконалює сучасні перекладацькі моделі й включає професійну стійкість (адаптивне подолання, встановлення меж) та структури сталості (травматично зорієнтований підхід, інституційна підтримка). Інституційні структури є життєво важливими елементами психологічної рівноваги громадських перекладачів.

Дійдено висновку, що ефективний та етичний громадський переклад ґрунтується на визнанні перекладачів як емоційно й когнітивно залучених культурних посередників, чий фах вимагає психологічної обізнаності, культурної усвідомленості й схвального середовища. Майбутні дослідження мають включати тривале вивчення впливу кумулятивної травми й оцінку ефективності структурованих систем підтримки, таких як моделі колегіальної супервізії й навчальних модулів, що враховують вплив психологічної травми, для підвищення професійної дієздатності громадських перекладачів.

**Ключові слова:** громадський переклад, культурне посередництво, міжкультурна компетентність, емоційне навантаження, психологічне навантаження, стійкість, сталість.

**Defining the Problem and Argumentation of the Topicality of the Consideration.** The issue of emotional and cultural load in community interpreting has become increasingly urgent in recent years, particularly in contexts marked by social instability, forced migration, and humanitarian crises. Community interpreters frequently operate in emotionally charged environments:

healthcare facilities, legal institutions, shelters, military contexts, and emergency response settings, where they must balance linguistic accuracy with the psychological and cultural needs of highly vulnerable individuals. The problem becomes especially complex when interpreters themselves belong to the affected community, sharing similar traumatic experiences with those for whom they

interpret. This dual burden amplifies emotional strain, complicates professional neutrality, and challenges traditional assumptions about interpreter detachment.

The topicality of this issue is profoundly illustrated by the experience of Ukrainian community interpreters during the full-scale Russian invasion. Ukrainian interpreters working at border crossings, humanitarian hubs, hospitals, volunteer centers, and military units are required to translate not only language, but also human suffering, uncertainty, and trauma. Many of them interact with the internally displaced persons, survivors of violence, or soldiers with acute medical and psychological needs, while simultaneously coping with their own fear, grief, or loss. The emotional load in such circumstances is intensified by the urgency and life-or-death nature of communication, demanding that interpreters maintain accuracy and composure despite overwhelming stress. This reality has revealed significant gaps in interpreter training and support systems, making the study of emotional load not only academically relevant but societally necessary.

In addition to emotional pressure, the cultural dimension of community interpreting becomes critically important in wartime conditions. Interpreters frequently mediate between the Ukrainian cultural norms and those of international humanitarian staff, foreign journalists, medical responders, and military partners. Misunderstandings may arise from differences in trauma expression, perceptions of authority, communication strategies, or culturally embedded values related to dignity, resilience, and collective responsibility. Thus, cultural mediation requires more than clarifying terms – it involves negotiating worldviews, interpreting silence and emotion, and facilitating mutual comprehension in highly sensitive interactions.

At the same time, the Ukrainian wartime context foregrounds the concepts of sustainability and resilience within community interpreting. **Resilience** in this setting refers not only to the interpreter's psychological endurance but also to their capacity to continue functioning effectively in the face of chronic stress, exposure to trauma, and shifting cultural expectations. Ukrainian interpreters have demonstrated remarkable resilience by adapting rapidly to new communicative environments, maintaining professionalism despite fatigue, and developing strategies to protect their emotional well-being. Their ability to remain functional communicators in unstable conditions highlights the need for resilience-building training modules, psychological support programs, and reflective practices within interpreter education.

**Sustainability**, in turn, relates to the long-term viability of interpreting work under crisis conditions. Without institutional support, ethical guidelines for emotional self-care, and systemic recognition of interpreters' psychological risks, the profession becomes vulnerable to burnout, turnover, and declining quality of service. Sustainable community interpreting therefore requires policies that prioritize interpreter well-being, ensure ongoing professional development, establish mechanisms for emotional debriefing, and promote intercultural competence as a core skill. The Ukrainian experience underscores that interpreting in high-stress

humanitarian settings cannot depend solely on personal resilience; it must be supported by sustainable structures that protect both interpreters and the communities they serve.

In this context, examining the emotional and cultural load in community interpreting becomes essential not only for advancing theoretical understanding but also for developing practical frameworks that ensure interpreter resilience and the long-term sustainability of the profession. Understanding these dynamics contributes to more effective, humane communication in crisis settings and reinforces the broader social role of community interpreters as mediators of accessibility, dignity, and human rights.

#### **Analysis of Recent Research and Publications.**

Recent scholarship has paid increasing attention to the emotional, cognitive, and cultural dimensions of community interpreting, reflecting global shifts in humanitarian, medical, legal, and crisis-related communication. A significant research trend concerns the emotional burden and psychological vulnerability of interpreters working in high-stakes environments. E. Hsieh and F. Hong demonstrate that interpreters in healthcare and emergency settings frequently experience secondary trauma, chronic stress, and burnout due to prolonged exposure to suffering and crisis. Their study emphasizes that emotional overload is not incidental but inherent to community interpreting in settings involving trauma survivors, refugees, and distressed patients [4]. These findings echo the results of A. C. Gieshoff, C. Lehr and A. H. Heeb, who identified heightened cognitive and physiological responses to emotionally charged content, indicating that emotional stimuli directly influence interpreters' processing capacity and accuracy [2].

The emotional intensity of interpreting is further amplified in conflict zones. B. Moser-Mercer analyses the ethical tensions and emotional labor faced by interpreters embedded in military and humanitarian operations. Her findings highlight situations where interpreters must navigate traumatic narratives, life-or-death decisions, and intercultural misunderstandings under extreme pressure. The study demonstrates that such environments require robust mechanisms for emotional self-regulation, ethical decision-making, and intercultural mediation, mechanisms that are currently underdeveloped in many interpreter training programs [6].

Cultural competence and mediation constitute another central theme in recent scholarship. E. A. Jacobs, L. C. Diamond propose a framework for culturally responsive interpreting that addresses implicit bias, unequal power dynamics, and the communicative gaps that arise from culturally grounded misunderstandings. This framework positions interpreters as active cultural negotiators who manage not only linguistic transfer but also social expectations, identity issues, and context-specific norms [5]. H. Tebble similarly underscores the evolving role of community interpreters as cultural brokers whose work significantly affects access to justice, healthcare, and public services [10, 88–95, 128–140].

Broader discussions on social justice and linguistic rights provide an important macro-level perspective. G. Ruiz and C. Valero-Garcés argue that community

interpreting is foundational to equitable access to public institutions, emphasizing that interpreting practices must be aligned with human rights and social justice principles. Their work situates interpreting within global movements for linguistic inclusion, positioning interpreters as key agents in sustaining democratic participation for linguistically diverse populations [9, 3–15, 55–65].

Foundational theoretical contributions also continue to shape the field. D. Gile's Effort Models explain how limited cognitive resources intersect with emotional overload, making interpreters more vulnerable to errors when confronted with psychologically intense content [3, 172–178]. R. Povoroznyuk expands this perspective with a psycholinguistic analysis of interpreter training in Ukraine, showing how cognitive load, attention management, and emotional resilience must be integrated into professional preparation, especially in societies experiencing war-related trauma and displacement [8].

A growing body of research connects these emotional and cultural dimensions with broader concepts of *sustainability* and *resilience* in interpreting. B. Moser-Mercer emphasizes the cognitive limits of interpreters and the need for sustainable workloads and support systems to prevent fatigue-induced decline in performance. Her work suggests that emotional strain, if unaddressed, undermines long-term cognitive functioning and places interpreters at risk of burnout [7]. E. Bielsa, examining cosmopolitanism and translation, highlights the interpreter's role in sustaining communication across cultural divides, particularly in contexts where cultural resilience – the capacity of communities to maintain identity and coherence under pressure – is crucial. Her perspective positions interpreters as facilitators of cultural continuity and adaptability, reinforcing their significance in humanitarian and crisis situations [1, 145–160].

Research across these domains converges on the understanding that resilience, psychological, cognitive, and cultural, is essential for interpreter effectiveness. Sustainability in interpreting practice requires institutional support, trauma-informed training, and ethical frameworks that protect interpreter well-being while ensuring high-quality service delivery. The wartime Ukrainian experience, as discussed by R. Povoroznyuk [8], demonstrates how interpreters' resilience is continually tested and how sustainable professional conditions are necessary to maintain consistent, ethical communication in prolonged crisis contexts.

Overall, recent scholarship highlights a multidimensional shift in interpreting studies: from viewing interpreters as neutral linguistic channels toward understanding them as emotionally engaged, culturally situated, cognitively limited, yet deeply resilient professionals. This reorientation underscores the urgency of exploring emotional and cultural load not only as theoretical constructs but as practical determinants of sustainability and ethical practice in contemporary community interpreting.

**Setting the Goals and Tasks of the Article.** The primary *goal* of this article is to investigate the emotional and cultural load experienced by community interpreters, particularly in high-stakes and crisis-affected

environments, and to analyze how these factors influence interpreter performance, decision-making, and professional sustainability. By examining current theoretical approaches and empirical findings, the article aims to highlight the complex interplay between emotional labor, cultural mediation, resilience, and long-term professional viability in community interpreting.

To achieve this overarching goal, the article sets the following specific *tasks*:

a) to define and conceptualize emotional and cultural load within the context of community interpreting, drawing on contemporary research and interdisciplinary perspectives;

b) to examine the psychological, cognitive, and cultural challenges that interpreters encounter in medical, legal, humanitarian, and conflict-related settings;

c) to analyze the mechanisms of resilience and sustainability that support interpreters' long-term effectiveness and well-being, including coping strategies, institutional support, and training approaches;

d) to explore the role of cultural mediation as a core component of community interpreting and to determine how cultural factors amplify or mitigate emotional strain;

e) to contextualize the discussion within the Ukrainian wartime experience, illustrating how interpreters navigate intensified emotional and cultural pressures in conditions of ongoing conflict;

f) to formulate conclusions and recommendations for enhancing interpreter training, improving support systems, and developing sustainable professional practices that acknowledge the emotional and cultural dimensions of community interpreting.

Together, these tasks provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of emotional and cultural load in community interpreting and underscore the need for resilient and sustainable strategies that ensure both interpreter well-being and high-quality communication in diverse public-service environments.

**The Outline of the Main Research Material.** The analysis of emotional and cultural load in community interpreting requires an integrated approach that connects psychological resilience, cultural mediation, and sustainable professional practice. While E. A. Jacobs, L. C. Diamond's framework of culturally responsive interpreting demonstrates how interpreters can manage implicit bias, unequal power dynamics, and culturally conditioned misunderstandings [5, 1–7], contemporary conditions, especially those shaped by humanitarian crises and armed conflict, call for an expanded model that incorporates resilience and long-term sustainability as essential competencies.

Interpreters working in medical, legal, and conflict-related settings often find themselves navigating situations where emotional intensity intersects with cultural complexity. The research of E. Hsieh and F. Hong [4], B. Moser-Mercer [6], and A. C. Gieshoff, C. Lehr and A. H. Heeb [2] confirm that emotional saturation affects decision-making, cognitive load, and overall performance. Building on these insights, the present article argues that cultural mediation alone is no longer sufficient: interpreters must develop adaptive strategies that



protect their psychological well-being while ensuring communicative effectiveness in unstable and high-pressure environments.

At the same time, the cultural dimension cannot be separated from sustainability. As E. Bielsa notes in her work on cosmopolitanism and translation, interpreting is inherently a relational practice that sustains intercultural understanding and preserves the communicative fabric of diverse communities [1, 135–150]. Thus, interpreters contribute not only to immediate communication but also to the resilience of social structures themselves. B. Moser-Mercer's findings further underscore the importance of designing working conditions and training models that align with human cognitive limits, preventing overload and burnout [7].

Drawing on these perspectives, as well as Ukrainian experience during wartime, where community interpreters must constantly negotiate trauma, cultural dislocation, and shifting institutional contexts, it becomes clear that interpreter sustainability is both a personal and a systemic issue. Resilience is not simply an internal psychological trait but a professional skill that emerges at the intersection of emotional regulation, cognitive adaptation, cultural awareness, and ethical clarity.

For this reason, the article proposes a **Resilience- and Sustainability-Oriented Framework for Community Interpreting** visualized by the model (Fig. 1). The framework integrates emotional, cultural, cognitive, and systemic variables into a unified model that emphasizes interpreter well-being as a condition for ethical and effective practice. It expands E. A. Jacobs,

L. C. Diamond's emphasis on cultural responsiveness [5] by incorporating two additional layers:

1) **professional resilience**: adaptive coping, emotional regulation, boundary-setting;

2) **sustainability structures**: training, institutional support, workload management, trauma-informed policy.

The **Resilience and Sustainability** model positions the interpreter not only as a cultural negotiator (as E. A. Jacobs, L. C. Diamond's framework [5] does) but also as a resilient professional operating within sustainable systems. It recognizes that emotional and cultural load cannot be managed solely at the individual level; they must be addressed through cognitive strategies and institutional structures. By emphasizing sustainability, the model also responds to long-term challenges identified by researchers such as B. Moser-Mercer [7] and supported by wartime Ukrainian interpreters' experiences, where chronic stress and cumulative trauma require more than ad-hoc coping.

Thus, the proposed framework provides a holistic conceptual foundation for understanding, teaching, and supporting community interpreting in a world increasingly marked by crisis, displacement, and intercultural complexity.

Community interpreting operates at the intersection of linguistic precision, emotional exposure, and cultural negotiation, making it one of the most demanding forms of communicative mediation. Research in interpreting studies consistently demonstrates that cognitive effort, emotional load, and cultural load do not function as

## RESILIENCE & SUSTAINABILITY MODEL

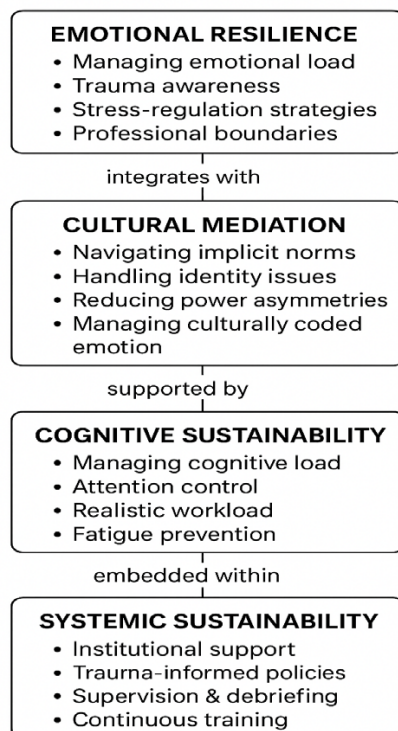


Fig. 1. Resilience and Sustainability Model for Community Interpreting

separate dimensions but rather as a tightly interwoven triad that shapes the interpreter's performance and long-term professional sustainability. **Cognitive load** refers to the limited processing resources required to simultaneously comprehend, store, and reformulate incoming messages. Foundational models by D. Gile [3, 160–170] and psycholinguistic analyses by B. Moser-Mercer [7] show that interpreters work at the threshold of attentional and memory capacity, and even small additional demands can destabilize performance. **Emotional load**, arising from distressing narratives, traumatic events, or morally charged situations, competes for these same cognitive resources. Studies by E. Hsieh and F. Hong [4] as well as A. C. Gieshoff, C. Lehr and A. H. Heeb [2] reveal that emotionally intense content provokes physiological stimulation, narrows attentional focus, and diminishes working memory capacity, leading to measurable declines in output accuracy. Thus, emotional strain does not merely coexist with cognitive effort but actively reshapes and constrains it.

**Cultural load** further complicates this dynamic. Community interpreters must not only relay information but also navigate implicit social norms, culturally coded emotions, and power asymmetries. E. A. Jacobs, L. C. Diamond's framework for culturally responsive interpreting emphasizes that interpreters frequently act as cultural negotiators, mediating unstated assumptions, identity positioning, and contextually embedded meanings [5]. This mediation requires complex inferential work, which heightens cognitive demand and may trigger emotional reactions, particularly when cultural norms clash or when the interpreter belongs to the same cultural or vulnerable community as the client. The interaction is cyclical: cultural ambiguity increases cognitive effort, cognitive overload reduces the ability to manage cultural nuance, and emotional strain intensifies both. Taken together, the triad forms a dynamic, mutually reinforcing system in which pressure in one dimension inevitably intensifies the others.

The Ukrainian wartime context offers a particularly vivid illustration of this compounded load. Many Ukrainian community interpreters working with displaced families, foreign journalists, humanitarian organizations, and medical personnel share the same collective trauma as those they assist. This overlap of identity amplifies emotional reactivity and complicates neutrality, making it far more difficult to maintain professional distance. Cultural mediation also acquires a heightened significance: interpreters must explain culturally grounded war-related behaviors, negotiate misunderstandings between the Ukrainian civilians and international responders, and sometimes defend the dignity or credibility of the people they serve. Such tasks carry both cognitive and emotional weight, especially when interpreters are simultaneously processing their own losses, displacement, or uncertainty. Field evidence, including observations synthesized in the Ukrainian scholarship [8], shows that interpreters often operate in unstable environments with irregular schedules, insufficient rest, and minimal institutional support. These conditions exacerbate cognitive fatigue and accelerate emotional burnout, revealing the structural fragility of interpreting work during protracted crises.

Despite these challenges, Ukrainian interpreters have also demonstrated remarkable resilience. Their adaptive practices: rapid pre-briefings before assignments, informal peer supervision, supportive team communication, and brief debriefing sessions after traumatic encounters, function as grassroots mechanisms that buffer the combined load. These emergent strategies reflect broader theoretical insights into resilience and sustainability in interpreting: that long-term professional viability depends not only on individual skill but also on systemic support, ethical clarity, and trauma-informed organizational practices. Scholars such as G. Ruiz and C. Valero-Garcés stress the importance of institutional structures that protect interpreters' well-being [9, 165–180], while B. Moser-Mercer highlights the ethical tensions that intensify in conflict settings [6]. Interpreting in such environments requires not simply accuracy, but a holistic capacity to regulate emotion, navigate culture, and distribute cognitive effort in ways that remain ethical, transparent, and sustainable over time.

The combined insights from cognitive science, trauma studies, and cultural mediation research make clear that community interpreting is sustained not by linguistic proficiency alone but by a multi-level architecture of resilience. This includes emotional self-regulation, cultural intelligence, cognitive workload management, and institutional policies that acknowledge the interpreter's vulnerability and humanity. The Ukrainian experience underscores both the urgency and the possibility of building such an architecture. In conditions where emotional trauma, cultural complexity, and cognitive strain intensify simultaneously, interpreters embody not only communicative bridges but also agents of resilience whose well-being determines the quality, ethics, and continuity of public-service communication.

### Conclusions and directions for further research.

The analysis of cognitive, emotional, and cultural load in community interpreting demonstrates that these dimensions form an interdependent system that profoundly shapes interpreter performance, ethical decision-making, and long-term sustainability. The interrelations among these loads, where emotional intensity narrows cognitive capacity, cultural ambiguity increases inferential demands, and cognitive overload reduces the interpreter's ability to mediate sensitively, highlight the need for a holistic understanding of interpreter well-being. The Ukrainian wartime context further underscores the urgency of this perspective. Interpreters working in the conditions of collective trauma, linguistic diversity, and fluctuating institutional support exemplify both the vulnerabilities and the remarkable resilience inherent in community interpreting. Their experience reveals that sustainability is not merely an individual trait but a systemic condition requiring coordinated interventions at personal, organizational, and societal levels.

This study affirms that effective and ethical community interpreting depends on recognizing interpreters as emotionally and cognitively engaged cultural mediators whose work requires trauma literacy, cultural intelligence, and supportive infrastructures. Emotional resilience, cognitive sustainability, and cultural responsiveness should therefore become foundational components of interpreter education and professional policy.

Furthermore, institutions relying on interpreters: hospitals, courts, humanitarian organizations, must move toward trauma-informed, ethically responsible frameworks that safeguard interpreters' mental health, support reflective practice, and ensure reasonable workloads. Such systemic measures are necessary not only for interpreter well-being but for ensuring accurate, equitable communication for vulnerable populations.

Future research should further refine this multi-dimensional understanding. Longitudinal studies are needed to examine the cumulative impact of emotional and cultural strain on interpreters operating in protracted crises, particularly in conflict or post-conflict regions. Experimental research could investigate how specific cultural mediation strategies influence cognitive load

and client outcomes, while psychophysiological studies may provide deeper insight into the mechanisms linking emotional stimulation with performance fluctuations. Comparative studies between the Ukrainian interpreters and those working in other high-stakes environments would enrich understanding of universal versus context-specific resilience factors. Additionally, the development and evaluation of structured support systems: peer supervision models, trauma-informed training modules, digital coping tools, represent promising avenues for enhancing interpreter sustainability. Ultimately, advancing research in this area will help build more resilient infrastructures, ensure more equitable multilingual communication, and strengthen the ethical foundations of community interpreting as a profession.

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