Thai-Japanese communication through interpreters at international hospitals in Bangkok

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Some statistics…

Foreign patients
1.4 million in 2007 (NaRanongs 2011)

Medical tourism
“the birthplace of contemporary medical tourism”
0.45 million (Boston Consulting Group 2006)

Foreign residents
About one million
Multilingualism in Hospitals

- Overseas-trained Doctors
- Translated information: Website, leaflets
- Through interpreter

Q11: What training and licensing do hospital nurses, pharmacists, imaging and lab technicians receive?

Q12: Will I have trouble communicating?

English is widely spoken around the hospital. You will be able to communicate in English with Bumrungrad doctors, medical and customer service staff. We also employ 109 interpreters to help patients who speak other languages.
We have launched a special team to offer an even better service to our valued Japanese patients. We will provide quality medical care that is supported by medical staffs and nurses who have trained both in Japanese culture and language.
Japanese speaking doctors in Bangkok

- Japanese speaking doctors in Bangkok...

- Solamatsu Wannocomton, MD
  Prof. Emeritus, Director, Bangkok International Hospital, Emeritus Professor of Tokyo University

- Background:
  - Founded in 1960, Bangkok International Hospital is one of the leading healthcare providers in Thailand.
  - The hospital offers a wide range of medical services, including acute care, chronic disease management, and preventive health care.
  - It has a team of experienced doctors and nurses who are dedicated to providing high-quality care to patients.

- Services:
  - Inpatient and outpatient care
  - Emergency services
  - Surgical procedures
  - Diagnostic services
  - Rehabilitation services

- Location:
  - The hospital is situated in the heart of Bangkok, making it easily accessible to patients from all over Thailand.

- History:
  - The hospital was established by a group of Japanese doctors who had a vision of creating a world-class healthcare facility in Thailand.
  - Over the years, the hospital has grown significantly and has become a respected institution in the region.
What have other researchers said?

<Thai-Japanese communication>
Imai (2010)

<Medical interpretation>
Leanza (2007)
Verrept (2008)
Angelelli (2008)
Research Aims:

- To understand workplace practices of interpreters in international hospitals
- To identify discourses that constitute “interpreting Japanese patients”
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<tr>
<th>Analyzed materials</th>
<th>Interviewees</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Semi structured interviews</td>
<td>• Three Japanese section managers</td>
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<td>2. Informal interviews</td>
<td>• Four former-patients</td>
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<td>3. Field notes</td>
<td>• Six interpreters</td>
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<td>4. Websites</td>
<td>from three major hospitals</td>
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<td>5. Magazines</td>
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Participants: Six hospital interpreters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fon</th>
<th>Akako</th>
<th>Marie</th>
<th>Yuki</th>
<th>Ten</th>
<th>Kazuko</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>20s</td>
<td>30s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language 1</strong></td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>JPN</td>
<td>JPN</td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>JPN</td>
<td>JPN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language 2</strong></td>
<td>JPN</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>JPN</td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>Thai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years in interpretation</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 (E2, T3)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medical backgrounds</strong></td>
<td>Pharmacy</td>
<td>Nurse 17</td>
<td>Nurse 6</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
General description of interprets’ job

What they do?
  Interpretation in the consultation rooms, interpretation for in-patients, taking telephone calls from out-patients, attending Japanese service counter, liaising with insurance companies etc..

Hours of work?
  24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

How many interpreters?
  About 10 to 20 Thai-Japanese interpreters.

In-house training
  50 to 100 plus OJT.
There are some people who **simply think they are better than us** in Thailand.

When some Japanese get angry, **they use very strong language**... 
**Maybe because I am a Thai. (…..)** He may not have said that if I were a Japanese. Thai and Japanese, we are the same. We should deserve equal treatment. Thai interpreters do interpret with the greatest of care. **We do help them to communicate with others. That is a good thing. And this is what I get for return?**

This hospital is a private one. It is expensive. It is natural for them to expect good service. But **I have to admit there are times we can not meet their expectation.**
Japanese interpreters as troubleshooters

Old people tend to speak not so clearly. In these cases, I have to clarify and say “Excuse me?“ or so. Sometimes, these get them irritated. And when they get upset, they say “I do not need Thai, send me Japanese!!“. I get that a lot.

If the patient has a real problem, I call a Japanese interpreter. I know it is better to make it Japanese-Japanese communication.

Thai interpreters ask Japanese to take care of “difficult” patients. (....) Japanese patients tend to ask a lot. More than Thai would. They ask for what they would ask in Japan. Thai would not do that much. But because I am a Japanese, I know what and why they ask. So, I will do it before even they ask. Then, they smile, say “thank you” and go home happily. Well, but of course, there are some people even we cannot handle, but there are always some people like that.
Why Japanese interpreters can solve the problem?

This happened when I just started the job. One patient wanted to know something but he was not satisfied with the answer a Thai interpreter gave. So, he asked for a Japanese interpreter. So, I went. But I knew nothing about the job yet then. Anyway, I asked what he wanted to know. But I did not know the answer for the question. So, I asked the Thai interpreter who gave the first answer. I gave exactly the same answer but, this time, he understood, saying “If a Japanese is saying so...”

Maybe they cannot trust Thai people there. I kind of understand it, because I’ve lived here long enough. I trust our staff here, we work together and I know they know the job well. But outside of the hospital, say I went shopping. I'd ask “Where can I find OOO” and one ship assistant may say “We don't have it”. But if I ask another shop assistant, she may say “Go to isle 5” or something. I get this a lot in Thai. If you get a lot of this, you can't help but start doubting... I feel that myself sometimes.
Compassion fatigue

It was the last moment of a baby. The father asked “Is he not breathing?” “Is he not coming back?” or so. I was... well, the doctor said “I'm sorry. The heart has stopped already”. I did not know what to do...(....) I was really... I know it was not my fault... But I could not do anything there. I couldn't.. Then, I finally cried.

Doctors say “Do not bring your feelings home but leave them here at the hospital” I get that, but when I hear their stories, I can't help but think about how hard it would be. I am a human being, too. My empathy gets me to feel the patient's situation and gets me to suffer emotionally. I know it is better to just interpret, and do not think too much about patients. But it is obviously not easy...
Interpretation as a part of medical procedure

Patients should feel, depending on the work of interpreter of the day, “It was not really a good session today” or “I wonder if my explanation was correctly interpreted” or something like that. In this respect, the role of interpreter is crucial. Maybe the biggest of all. Whatever the doctor said, it’s really up to the interpreter to say how it will be said. So, because of the interpretation, regardless of what doctor thinks or says, the patient might think “Why did the doctor say such a harsh thing to me today...” or “There was a really cold statement during the session...” or something like that.

Psychiatry or psychosomatic medicine... Really difficult. Sometimes, the session gets really long. Interpreting her distress to the doctor… I am always worried if I could interpret to the 100% level. You know, it is a mental thing. And sometimes, I am even afraid to clarify some details with the patient...
Things we need to know about Thai-Japanese communication through interpreters are …

1. Japanese patients has little patience
2. They tend to undervalue Thai interpreters
3. Japanese interpreters act as troubleshooters
4. Training is required to protect interpreters and improve medical service
Acknowledgment

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