



# CoMe

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**Title:** *“Court Interpreters – Conversational Analysis of the Trial against Amanda Knox”*

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**Languages:** Italian

The goal of this thesis is to analyze the interaction among parties in a Court from a linguistic point of view, by highlighting how interpreters work and the way they achieve their goal.

The starting point of this thesis is the need to communicate the law to people, which has always been a common need in every society. In case of people who speak a different language, a person knowing that language has been generally recruited to explain them the law, so as to allow the parties to understand each other. Only by doing so, good societies could exist. That is the key.

The first step taken in the first chapter to meet the research goal was to see how the role of interpreters has changed during centuries, by analyzing relevant rules having marked this profession. According to Cesare Beccaria, “law exists to preserve and benefit society as a whole. But, because people act out of self-interest and their interest sometimes conflicts with societal laws, they commit crimes”. In his most influential essay “On Crime and Punishments” (1764), Beccaria identifies “a pressing need to reform the criminal justice system”, because the legal system was “barbaric and antiquated”, and attributes specific roles to the various members of the court.<sup>1</sup>

In the second chapter, attention is focused on the asymmetry characterizing institutional interactions in court, highlighting how difficult the interpreter’s role becomes because of this.

The third and last chapter is the phonetic analysis of the trial against Amanda Knox. The research questions were: what is the main element emerging from the analysis? And the result was that participants lacked linguistic awareness in every single step of the trial.

To understand this, the analysis moves from Orletti’s adaptation of Goffman’s claim that

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<sup>1</sup> BECCARIA (1764).

interaction is co-built by participants who help determining the conversation structure<sup>2</sup>. In this framework, as Bellucci notices, participants in a trial are not aware of linguistic complexity and variety. That is why, interpreters have to conduct their work by mediating between people and the judiciary system. Since we cannot demand single citizens to know technical terms, investing on interpreters is the only solution, making sure that they develop proper skills and providing them with the tools needed to manage good communication in a Court. Only if all of these requirements are satisfied, a trial can have a good success.

In her '*Community Interpreting*', Hale asserts that "professional interpreters have a responsibility to acquire the necessary language and interpreting skills, to gain an understanding of the settings in which they work and their requirements, of the purpose for which language is used in each of these settings, and to abide by a code of ethics".<sup>3</sup> To this aim, the Italian Association of Translators and Interpreters (AITI) suggests the use of Durban's "Translation: Getting it Right", a small guide to technical translation, aiming to explain what is the role of a Court interpreter and translator and focuses on those concepts that often do not have equivalents in the target language. According to the guide, any operators of the judiciary system should consider the importance for an interpreter to know in advance what is going to be discussed in the courtroom, as well as the crime and the motive. By doing so, similarly to conference interpreters, it will be possible to contribute to the communicative context thus satisfying all the needs and expectations of the parties involved.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> ORLETTI (2000).

<sup>3</sup> HALE (2007).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*.

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