The Routledge Handbook of Interpreting

Edited by Holly Mikkelson and Renée Jourdenais
The Routledge Handbook of Interpreting provides a comprehensive survey of the field of interpreting for a global readership. The handbook includes an introduction and twenty-seven chapters by contributors who are experts involved in the interpreting profession and leading academics in their area.

The four sections cover:

- The history and evolution of interpreting;
- The core areas of the field from conference interpreting to transcription, and interpreting in conflict zones to voiceover;
- Current issues and debates, from ethics and the role of the interpreter to the impact of globalization;
- A look to the future.

Suggestions for further reading are provided with every chapter. The Routledge Handbook of Interpreting is an essential purchase for advanced undergraduate and postgraduate students of interpreting studies. Professionals working in interpreting or those looking to work in the field will also find this book invaluable.

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INTRODUCTION

Renée Jourdenais and Holly Mikkelsen

Interpreting is an activity that has been practiced since time immemorial, but only recently has it been viewed as a field of academic study in and of itself. From our perspective working in an institution that has been training interpreters for half a century, we have noted a growing interest in interpreting studies, driven by national and international needs for qualified interpreters in all domains: from international organizations, to private sector enterprises, and to public service organizations. We have also seen a corresponding increase in short programs and academic course offerings designed to introduce people to and train them for careers as interpreters. Some of these training programs reside in universities, while others are offered by community organizations or enterprising businesses. This increased desire for training has come to our attention through countless inquiries from prospective trainees and from other institutions seeking guidance on setting up programs. Thus, we have first-hand awareness of the important need to prepare interpreters well for the specialized sectors in which they will be employed. The need for qualified interpreters spans all domains: legal, medical, business, educational, political, governmental, academic, to name just a few. And each of these domains has nuances particular to it, whether it is the language-combination needs of the international organizations, the growing ethical concerns in the public service sectors, the challenge of integrating new technologies into the field, or the need for cost-effective interpreting – which happens to cross all domains. We felt that a volume that would introduce readers to recent issues in interpreting, to the many areas of professional work in the field, and to the particular needs and challenges of each, as well as to newly developing areas in which interpreters work, would be of great value.

Perhaps ironically, at a time when the need for well-trained interpreters is being recognized – particularly in the United States – we have also noted that language studies programs are at a critical juncture in this country, with fewer students studying languages, yet greater articulated needs from government and industry for competent multilingual professionals. As a result, many US-based language programs are striving to identify professional opportunities for their students, and those of us committed to the training of interpreters are striving to keep students interested in learning languages by showing students that the field of interpreting can provide an array of career possibilities. Countries around the world are, in fact, struggling to meet the needs of the interpretation industry. Sometimes this is due to large numbers of interpreter retirees in the “baby boomer” generation; other times this may be due to increased visibility in the global
community, and still others, we are sad to say, perhaps due to less than ideal working conditions for interpreters – which the field is actively trying to remedy.

Given the diversity of the field and the various reasons for which interpreters may be in demand, we have designed this volume with a varied readership in mind. We envision this book as a valuable resource for current professionals in the field who would like to be updated on areas of growth in interpreting, and an important resource for language professors and students or young professionals (both BA-level and MA-level) who are interested in exploring these exciting career opportunities and would like to identify which area of the field is “right” for them. We also hope that this overview of the many areas the interpreting field covers may assist those language professors who have been asked to expand their offerings in order to introduce interpreting to their students. And we would like to inspire those committed to the interpreting field to note the areas needed for growth and development and to actively work to enhance this rewarding profession.

To ensure that the volume is accessible to this range of readership, we have asked all of the contributing authors to provide a brief historical look at their area of focus, a description of the current state of the field from their particular perspective, and their thoughts as to where this segment of the field may be headed. We have also ensured that terms and concepts are well-defined, and that the chapters build upon one another, with as little duplication as possible, in the case that the book is read in its entirety. We have also asked authors to provide a list of “Further reading” for those who may be interested in pursuing these topics in more depth.

**Design of the volume**

As noted above, interpreting studies is a relatively young field. The first definitive work on this subject, *Introducing Interpreting Studies* (Pöchhacker 2004), was published by Routledge just 10 years ago. Drawing largely on the field of translation studies (Venuti [2000] 2012; Munday [2001] 2012; Baker [1998] 2011; Snell-Hornby 1988), Pöchhacker defines interpreting as “translational activity,” a special form of translation that is distinguished by its temporal immediacy (2004:9). Rather than confine the definition to mere “oral translation,” as many have done, he views the field more broadly to encompass signed as well as spoken languages. He also looks at the phenomenon from a historical perspective and categorizes different types of interpreting according to the “social context of interaction, or setting” in which it occurs (ibid.:13). Another approach to defining the field is by modality (spoken or signed/visual, consecutive or simultaneous, etc.), directionality (uni- or bilateral, relay, etc.) or use of technology (remote or face-to-face, etc.). Pöchhacker concludes his analysis of the scope of interpreting by identifying eight dimensions in the “map” of interpreting: (1) medium, (2) setting, (3) mode, (4) languages (cultures), (5) discourse, (6) participants, (7) interpreter qualifications and (8) problem, i.e., component skills, challenges, and so on (ibid.:23–4). In this volume, although we have decided to use the term “interpreting” alone without the “studies” label, we have attempted to cover all of the dimensions identified by Pöchhacker in his comprehensive description.

In order to ensure that readers have the most complete view possible of the field, we sought to include a chapter for what we envision to be each of the core areas important to the interpreting profession. We then organized the volume into four parts: I. Historical Perspectives, II. Modes of Interpreting, III. Interpreting Settings, and IV. Issues and Debates.

In the first part of the volume, Historical Perspectives, we situate both the profession and the many who impact it, including professional organizations, international employers, and researchers. We begin the volume with Jesús Baigorri-Jalón’s historical overview of the field of interpreting in which he traces the interpreting field from some of its earliest known references
in Ancient Egypt through the Lewis and Clark expeditions of the 19th century, into the advent of interpreting technologies associated with the Nuremburg Trials, and to the remote interpreting opportunities that present themselves today. This chapter is then followed by Julie Boéri’s look at key internal players within the interpreting field and the ways that they have shaped and continue to define the profession. Her examination includes the roles that professional organizations, training bodies, and the academic community have played in determining the directions of the field. She also looks at those more on the “margins” of these traditional influencers who are also having an impact on the shaping of the interpreting profession. Sofia García-Beytaert follows Boéri’s internal perspective with a case study examination of external factors that have contributed, both positively and negatively, to the development of the profession. Her three cases include the role a professional organization has played, the development of the sign language interpreting profession, and the de-professionalization of court interpreting in Europe. Through the exploration of these case studies, García-Beytaert examines the many external factors that have shaped and continue to shape the profession. Franz Pöchhacker’s chapter, the final contribution in this section, then addresses the evolution of interpreting research. His work explores the many research strands that have contributed to our growing understanding of the practice of interpreting. He concludes the chapter with the major current trends and key challenges that can be expected to dominate research on interpreting in its different modes, modalities and domains in the years ahead.

Part II of this volume places emphasis on the different modalities of interpreting. We have attempted to be inclusive of all the modes in which today’s interpreters may find themselves working. We begin with a chapter by Kilian Seeber on simultaneous interpreting. In this chapter, Seeber discusses how this modality has come to be one of the most widely used in the field of conference interpreting. The complexity and difficulty of the task are discussed, as are many of the factors that contribute to these task features. Also addressed are some of the underlying constructs of simultaneous interpreting, such as memory and language proficiency, as well as the role that technology has played – and will continue to play – in shaping the future of this interpreting modality. The next chapter focuses on consecutive interpreting. Kayoko Takeda and Debra Russell present the issues that impact effective consecutive interpreting, including cognitive and linguistic variables and the importance of good note-taking. They explore both the monologic and dialogic environments in which consecutive interpreting is used, highlighting the manner in which a dialogic interpreting event is co-created by the participants involved – importantly, now seen as inclusive of the interpreter. Karen Bontempo’s chapter presents the history of signed language interpreting and underscores some of the unique demands inherent in working in two different language modalities (signed and spoken, i.e., visual and auditory). A discussion of the many domains in which signed language interpreting is used highlights its pervasiveness throughout the Deaf community and the needs for quality training in the field. This chapter is followed by one by Jemina Napier, in which she focuses on the ways in which sign language interpreting both parallels and differs from spoken language interpreting.

The final chapters in this section address the interactions between interpreters and written texts. First is Wallace Chen’s contribution on sight translation, a hybrid mode that combines written texts and oral translation. He examines how sight translation differs from written translation, and explores both pedagogical and professional applications of this mode. Since sight translation has been used extensively in language learning and interpreter training, he focuses particularly on where it belongs in the curriculum. He concludes with a discussion of innovative pedagogical applications of this modality and research in sight translation. Finally, Carmen Valero-Garcés addresses the transcription and translation of spoken discourse in a variety of settings. Although this modality has myriad applications in a variety of disciplines, relatively
little research has been done on the topic. The chapter examines the theoretical and practical issues involved in transcribing and translating for different purposes, and then makes best practice recommendations and suggests future avenues for research. Thus, through the chapters in Part II, we hope the reader will gain an understanding of the skills required of interpreters in the different modes, the specific applications of those skills, and the impacts of technology on their use.

Part III of the volume shows how these particular modes of interpreting may be used in the many specialized settings in which interpreters work. Each author provides a brief historical look at interpreting in the respective setting and discusses the many issues and challenges that arise as practitioners focus on a particular interpretation in a particular setting. Ebru Diriker begins the discussion with an overview of conference interpreting. She looks at the professionalization of the field, echoing earlier chapters on the history of the profession and key internal and external players but with a particular focus on international organizations. Conference interpreting has been the subject of more research than other types of interpreting, and this chapter presents some of the key studies that have been conducted. It concludes with an analysis of what the future holds for this rapidly changing sector. In the next chapter, Jieun Lee then analyzes the unique challenges associated with court interpreting, in which interpreters work hand in hand with legal professionals at the intersection of disparate legal systems. She explores the ways in which the legal community both facilitates and shapes the role of the interpreter at both international and national levels, and then reports the findings of research in the field. She notes that the quality of interpreting has been a subject of particular interest in the court interpreting community, given the high stakes involved in court proceedings – a discussion which foregrounds the chapter on quality that comes in the fourth section of the book. In the next chapter, Sonja Pöllabauer examines a particular kind of legal interpreting, that which occurs in asylum proceedings, and explores the many ethical issues that arise there. In light of the rising tide of migration throughout the world, spurred by economic disruptions, social upheavals and eruptions of violence, interpreters are on the front lines in the struggle to meet the challenges associated with refugees seeking asylum in developed countries. Pöllabauer’s analysis of the linguistic, cultural and psychological aspects of the interpreter’s role in this fraught environment therefore makes a key contribution to this volume’s overview of the interpreting field. In the following chapter, Marjory Bancroft introduces community interpreting, an activity that continues to expand along with the aforementioned growth of international migration. Community-based interpreting covers a much broader realm than asylum interpreting, since it addresses the needs not only of refugees but also those of immigrants in general, as well as those faced by indigenous groups who avail themselves of public services; but in truth many of the issues faced by interpreters in these settings are similar to those that arise in asylum proceedings. Bancroft’s analysis of the driving forces behind this burgeoning field, including language policy and language access laws, sets the stage for an exploration of the complex role of interpreters in various community settings. She also looks at the training of community interpreters and makes recommendations for increased professionalization of the field.

The next three chapters in this section continue to delve into the interpreting services provided by specialist interpreters in some of the environments touched upon by Bancroft, namely, healthcare, mental health and education. First, Cynthia Roat and Ineke Crezee examine the role of interpreters in medical settings, including the cultural bridging that may be required in addition to the more typical language mediation in encounters between patients and highly trained healthcare specialists due to the frequent use of technical terms and jargon. The authors use the United States as a basis for discussing patterns of development in this ever-expanding profession, including standards of practice, regulation, training and certification. In the following
chapter, Hanneke Bot narrows the focus to a subcategory of healthcare interpreting, mental health interpreting, which also intersects at times with court or legal interpreting. Given the critical role of language in the diagnosis and treatment of mental patients, the provision of competent interpreting services is an essential element in what ideally should be a collaborative effort between professionals. In her analysis of different types of mental health encounters, Bot discusses the implications of research on interpreted communication and the influence interpreters can have on outcomes. She presents a continuum of possible positions, from interpreter as mechanical conduit to interpreter as co-therapist, and highlights the need for awareness of the potential for unintended consequences as interpreters intervene, to varying degrees, in the therapeutic process. She argues that this awareness can only be developed with more extensive training for both interpreters and mental health professionals so that they can ensure the best possible outcome for their patients. Similarly, Melissa Smith argues for more extensive training of interpreters who work in educational settings where they have a critical impact on learning and thus on the future of the individuals for whom they interpret. Her discussion includes the use of interpreters for students in primary, secondary and tertiary education, as well as adults in vocational training and court-mandated classes. After describing the function of interpreters in various learning environments and in ancillary interactions, such as parent-teacher communications, she reports on research findings and their implications for policy decisions with respect to interpreter qualifications.

The last two chapters in Part III branch out into two relatively new areas of interpreting that have received little attention from scholars thus far. First, Pedro Castillo discusses interpreting in the mass media, a growing field that is changing just as rapidly as is the technology supporting it. He presents a systematic analysis of how interpreters are recruited, where they may be asked to perform their services, and how the interpreted interactions are then organized and eventually broadcast in a vast array of events communicated through different media. Castillo emphasizes best practices throughout the chapter, and concludes by suggesting approaches for training interpreters for this highly specialized field and by recommending new avenues of research. The final setting presented in Part III is that of conflict zones, a lamentably growing area requiring interpreting services. In this chapter, Barbara Moser-Mercer defines what constitutes a conflict and outlines the measures that have been taken to protect interpreters in the midst of humanitarian disasters and military actions. She analyzes the implications of research findings and ethical considerations from other sectors, such as conference, court and community interpreting, for interpreting practice in conflict zones, and makes recommendations for policy-making, training and research for those who enter this challenging field.

The fourth section of the volume steps back from the minute analysis of specific modalities and settings of interpreting in order to explore the broader issues and debates ongoing in the field as a whole. Uldis Ozolins begins this section with a chapter on the challenging topic of ethics in interpreting situations, where interpreters become privy to highly confidential information and participate in very sensitive interactions that are often filled with emotion. He traces the development of ethical standards in different types of interpreting and then focuses on key issues that are still unresolved, describing the main positions adopted by theorists and practitioners across the range of interpreting sectors. Justine Ndongo-Keller delves into one of the most difficult ethical dilemmas faced by interpreters, dealing with vicarious trauma during and after assignments that require them to relay messages reflecting the very worst aspects of human behavior: extreme violence and emotional abuse. Drawing on her own experience interpreting in the United Nations International Criminal Tribunals for Rwanda, she examines the impact of these interactions on interpreters’ personal lives, and then presents relevant research findings with a view to developing methods of preventing vicarious trauma, to the extent possible.
through awareness-raising and training of all actors involved, and to optimizing the care and treatment of interpreters who nevertheless experience this type of trauma.

The growing influence of technology on interpreting, including both its pluses and minuses, is addressed in Sabine Braun’s chapter on remote interpreting. As many of the authors point out in this volume, technological changes are driving human communication in completely new directions, and the interpreters involved in such communication must keep up with a rapidly evolving array of devices and media that enable virtual interactions across vast distances. Braun surveys different interpreting settings and the impact of remote interpreting on all participants, but most particularly on interpreters themselves and their performance, as reflected in research in the field. She concludes with recommendations for further research, which in turn will inform the policies and training programs that must be developed to ensure quality interpreting in virtual environments. Increasing interest in the quality of interpreting and ways in which it is assessed by both interpreters and the users of interpreting are examined in the next chapter by Ángela Collados-Aís and Olalla García Becerra. They begin with a discussion of what quality is and, in fact, how difficult it is to define this surprisingly elusive concept. They then examine studies that have been conducted over the years to identify criteria for measuring quality and to develop methods of enhancing quality through proper training.

Continuing with the theme of quality, Jean Turner then discusses in the next chapter what some of these quality measures mean for the overall assessment of interpreters for different purposes. Noting the growing awareness of the need for competent interpreting and the ensuing rising interest in interpreter assessment, she looks at current practices in interpreter testing for certification and for admission to academic programs. Turner identifies the issues and challenges that have arisen in these contexts, and concludes by pointing out that recent publications have reported on assessment practices at different stages of interpreter training and of professional development, providing ample material for further research and improvement of assessment tools. In the next chapter, Chuanyun Bao describes the many ways in which interpreters are educated for the profession. He provides examples of topics addressed in the curricula of a small number of the hundreds of interpreter training programs that now exist throughout the world, some of them decades old and some founded mere months ago. Although the trend is increasingly toward graduate-level professional programs, there are also a plethora of short courses, certificate programs, orientation workshops and refresher courses being developed. Bao examines different modalities of presentation, ranging from traditional face-to-face instruction to blended or hybrid courses, to completely online programs, as well as a growing number of train-the-trainer programs aimed at alleviating the shortage of qualified instructors in these training programs. The role of non-professional interpreters in the field is both recognized and highlighted by Aída Martínez-Gómez in the chapter that follows. This is another area that has received scant attention from scholars and in fact has been excoriated by both academicians and practitioners, despite its ubiquity. The author points out that it is much more constructive to study the work of non-professional or ad hoc interpreters in order to shed more light on all aspects of interpreting. She reports on recent studies of this population from various points of view and emphasizes the value of taking a more inclusive approach in order to legitimate all kinds of interpreting and enhance understanding of the profession as a whole. The final contribution to this comprehensive survey of the interpreting profession comes from Mette Rudvin, whose chapter on professional identity examines how members of a profession construct their identities through a complex, interactive process, and then discusses how that process has taken place in the interpreting profession in particular. She concludes with an analysis of the implications for training interpreters and some predictions about future trends.
Introduction

We, the volume editors, then provide a brief final chapter with a synopsis of the topics and issues raised throughout the book and future directions for the field as highlighted by our contributing authors.

Our objectives for this volume

We hope that this comprehensive overview of the field of interpreting will give a voice to those who are actively engaged in interpreting, highlighting for non-interpreters the skills and challenges involved in this demanding field, and thereby leading to increased appreciation for work well done.

Our goal is for those who love learning languages to realize that their passions can lead to rewarding career opportunities, and we hope that they will find an area – or perhaps even two! – which have particularly piqued their interest and desire for further exploration.

Another key objective of this volume is that researchers from varied perspectives will recognize the wide range of research opportunities the field offers and contribute to the nascent, yet growing awareness of just what is involved in the activity of interpreting. The authors have each highlighted challenges facing each sector and we hope that by drawing attention to the issues interpreters face, we will find it easier to solve them.

We also hope to contribute to the growing professionalization of this field, which, although existing for thousands of years, has only more recently seemed to come into the awareness of the broader public.

And above all, it is our hope that readers will enjoy learning about a field that often sits just below the radar – behind a glass booth, next to a government figurehead, between a doctor and patient, next to an asylum seeker, or is simply “a voice” heard over a news broadcast – and realize that interpreters dedicate their professional lives to ensuring that we are able to communicate successfully across the globe.

References


PART I

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES
1

THE HISTORY OF THE INTERPRETING PROFESSION

Jesús Baigorri-Jalón

The one duty we owe to history is to rewrite it.

Oscar Wilde

Introduction

While I am writing, exchanges facilitated by interpreters are happening all around us. A frontline in Afghanistan, a court of justice in Guatemala or The Hague, a hospital in Canada or in the United States, an international conference in Sydney or Bangkok, a market in Morocco or Senegal, multilingual assemblies from Pretoria to Brussels or New York, countless conversations in neighborhoods, at border crossings, hotels, travel agencies and other businesses … all require interpreters: oral or sign language, professional or not, remunerated or not, in situ or remote. Other chapters in this book will explore many of these situations. And it has always been like this: since prehistoric times, contacts through interpreters must have existed, with different levels of frequency and sophistication, all over the world, whenever mutual intelligibility failed.

To clarify the title, I understand “history” as the branch of knowledge that will guide my explanation of examples from the past along a chronological path; “interpreter” as a person who translates speech orally or into sign language for parties who speak different languages; and “profession” as a paid occupation or calling based on expert knowledge and often academic training. Many of the interpreters in these pages do not fit fully into these definitions, because (1) their duties went beyond interpreting, (2) they were not paid, and/or (3) they had no formal preparation. Is it then possible to write a history of interpreting and, if so, what for and how? In my view, it is possible, if we look in the primary sources for the function of interpreting rather than the current concept of the profession. As in medicine or law, knowing a profession’s history is the first step to getting acquainted with it. Cicero’s idea of historia magistra vitae may not lead to our ability to predict the future accurately, but it surely prevents a widespread tendency to invent the wheel every day. Besides, recording oral memories, in a mainly spoken job, is a tribute to our predecessors and a legacy to our successors in the profession or, as I have said elsewhere (Baigorri 2006: 103), a future for our past and a past for our future. What history? Historical records – numerous and of many kinds – will become facts of history only when aptly
questioned by historians. This requires, as Delisle (1997–1998) proposed, historians’ methods,
tools and approaches – sometimes with the assistance of ancillary disciplines. The past can only
be interpreted by historians from their present, that is, from their own time. So there are different
potential pasts depending on the observer’s position, which will determine the approach, object
of study, scale, and periodization. This chapter offers one of those potential pasts, the one I see
from my rear-view mirror, that is, my concrete present, following standard Western periodization
for the sake of expediency.

It is impossible to present here an exhaustive list of the publications that have filled, particu-
larly in recent years, some of the empty spaces in our history’s jigsaw puzzle. Some authors
have written brief histories of interpreting with a “comprehensive” scope: Roditi (1982),
Bowen et al. (1995), Van Hoof (1996), and Andres (2012), to mention a few. Others have
written about the profession from a variety of perspectives or with a narrower focus (cf. Roland
1982; Kurz and Bowen 1999; Wils 1999; Bastin n.d.; Delisle and Lafond 2002). The Interna-
tional Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC 1996) and Bernet and Beetz (2005) pub-
lished videos on recent history; and Delisle (2014) publishes a regularly updated directory of
translation historians. All these are very interesting though fragmentary materials which can
guide readers. However, a comprehensive and updated handbook or compilation on the history
of interpreting – obviously a collective endeavor – remains to be completed. In my view, that
work should include the generally overlooked proto-history of research by scholars from
various disciplines, which goes back at least to the beginning of the 20th century. So far,
interested readers need to resort to largely compartmentalized and scattered pieces of research,
not always based on a theoretically sound historical background, and published – mostly in
writing but also in audio or video – by scholars from various disciplines or by interpreters
in different languages, and sometimes focused on very specific events or individuals.

Trying to avoid repetition of previous compilations, I intend to foreground a few impres-
sionistic examples to illustrate various stages in the interpreting profession’s evolution, as seen by
different authors, including myself, based on a variety of records and historical approaches, with
frequent zigzags between past and present and among geographical areas.

Interpreters as historical sources in ancient history:
from Egyptian leeks to Chinese poems

Interpreters in ancient history have drawn the attention of researchers since the proto-history
of interpreting research (Rolfe 1911; Gehman 1914). Thieme, Hermann and Glässer (1956) touched
upon this period and beyond. Kurz (1985a, 1985b, 1986) focused on Ancient Egypt, where the first
image of an interpreter is dated at Horemheb’s tomb (1330 BC), and Ancient Rome. Wiotte-
Franz (2001) published a comprehensive monograph on interpreters in antiquity (6th century BC
to 6th century AD) in which she reflects on interpreters’ participation in the geopolitical relations
of those periods, on interpreters’ fields of activity (courts, multilingual armies, administration,
trade, diplomacy, religion), and on interpreters’ portraits (their names where available, social
origins, training, and professional practice).

Throughout history, references to interpreting – an essentially oral job – are given in writing.
I wish to start with Herodotus (484–425 BC), as symbolic father of (Western) history. Her-
odotus’ journey to Egypt in the 5th century BC resembles, mutatis mutandis, a tourist visit to an
“exotic” place in our days, where guides and interpreters are needed to make the most of it. Let
me analyze briefly the following lines from Herodotus’ account at one of the pyramids, to
reflect on how historical sources are built.
On the pyramid it is declared in Egyptian writing how much was spent on radishes and onions and leeks for the workmen, and if I rightly remember that which the interpreter said in reading to me this inscription, a sum of one thousand six hundred talents of silver was spent …

(Histories, II, 125, Macaulay and Lateiner’s translation; Herodotus 2004)

This is an English translation of what Herodotus wrote in Greek from an original inscription in Egyptian – hieroglyphic or not we do not know – based on his recollection of the – oral – sight translation by an anonymous interpreter while visiting that pyramid. It seems that translating aloud was a routine 2,500 years ago, as it is nowadays. Elsewhere in his Histories, Herodotus says interpreters were one of the seven classes into which Egyptian society was divided, at least since Pharaoh Psammetichus organized the training of Egyptian children as interpreters by placing them with Ionians and Carians to learn Greek.

From a historian’s perspective, Herodotus’ words, in this translation, are the historical truth available to us, but they are subject to different interpretations. The text we read is the result of multiple transfers: from written to oral and then back to written, involving two languages, and then another translation from Greek into English. So the authorship is collective: a scribe who wrote the inscription, probably commissioned by someone else; an interpreter who translated it aloud; Herodotus, who noted it down in Greek from memory; and the English translators. Manipulation could be effected at various levels, but what matters here is the Egyptian interpreter’s role. We assume the interpreter was ethically honest. That is, he was not fabricating the contents of the inscription, which he could decipher because he was literate in Egyptian script, as Herodotus says, or because he knew it by heart as part of his training (we may wonder if his recital was the same routine explanation we hear from present-day guides the world over). And, secondly, we assume he was translating correctly: the vegetables – would there be equivalent species in Egypt and Greece or would his oral rendition be an adaptation, a domestication for Herodotus’ ears? – and the amount of money, an operation involving an instant currency exchange, assuming it was not Herodotus who made the conversion. Curiously enough, Schrader’s Spanish translation (Herodotus 1992 [1977]) reads ajos (“garlic”) instead of “leeks” – an adjustment to local tastes? Discrepancies between translators are attributable to the original manuscript used or to the challenge of finding equivalent words for plants, animals, etc., from other periods and places. What we can infer is that the interpreter-informant acted in his decision-making process as a gatekeeper, by selecting the message he conveyed – would he read the inscription verbatim, with all the caveats attached to the concept of verbatim, or only parts thereof? – and the terms he chose. Without speculating too much, it seems plausible the interpreter played other roles, inter alia, guiding Herodotus around other places and arranging his travel, food, and accommodation with local Egyptians: a precedent of facilitators or fixers, currently used by foreign journalists, defined by Martin (2010) as “a mix of executive assistant translator and field producer, who can schedule interviews with the powerful and mingle with the powerless”.

Now I turn to the written translation of three tribal poems as one of the earliest records of interpreting and translation activities in first-century (AD) China, “a rare treasure for interpreting historians” (Lung 2011: 10). In the context of the Sinicization of “barbarian” tribes in the Southwestern confines of the Latter Han empire, officials and interpreters from the capital were posted at the borders with the aim of “civilizing” these peoples. As a result of years of imperial Chinese “education”, some of the tribes arrived at the remarkable achievement of producing poems in honor of the emperor, and traveled to the capital to present them at the court. An interpreter, Tian Gong, conversant in the language of the “barbarians”, was probably behind the translations of the poems, which ended up in the Houhanshu or standard history of the Han
dynasty. So Tian Gong played the multiple roles of “cultural ambassador”, interpreter and “facilitator” for the imperial inspector, and escort interpreter for the tribesmen in their tribute journey to the capital (Lung 2011: 16, 18). Besides, according to Lung’s plausible reasoning, the interpreter assisted the history officer, custodian of the dynasty’s record, as “the only viable link between the indigenous poems and the historical records we hold today” (Lung 2011: 19). This last inference, that chroniclers transfer in writing the interpreters’ words, confirms the previous comments on Herodotus and many other historical examples. Another interesting element here is that interpreters in ancient China would participate in the actual drafting of the historical records, together with historians, based on their recollections and notes. That procedure reminds us of the methodical memoranda of conversation that interpreters were required to write after the actual interpreting was over in many twentieth century bilateral meetings whose records are available. Those notes often constituted the basis of communiqués, draft agreements, reports to the capital, and occasionally interpreters’ memoirs (for instance, Berezkho 1994; Korchilov 1997). In this context, it was only when Hitler’s high-level visitors realized that the Führer amended his interpreter’s notes after they had left that they started taking their own interpreters with them, not to challenge interpreter Paul Schmidt, whom they trusted, but to prevent Hitler’s manipulation of the records (Schmidt 1958: 373).

**Middlemen in the Middle Ages: alfaqueques in Spain, griots with a flash-forward to Africa**

The Crusades are identified with Christians trying to conquer their Holy Land from Muslim control during the Middle Ages. Christian crusaders were called Faranji – Franks – by Muslims, but not all spoke French (not even the Franks themselves!), so bilingual individuals were required to interpret in these polyglot multinational armies. The Iberian peninsula, present-day Spain and Portugal, was, from the arrival of Muslim troops in 711 till the end of the Granada kingdom in 1492, the turf of a particular crusade, a territory of constantly changing frontiers along cultural, religious, and linguistic lines. The situation of constant war – more often “cold” than “hot” – between Christians and Muslims, with Jews embedded on both sides, brought with it continuous skirmishes that resulted in the taking of captives, a lucrative source of money for the captors. As borders fluctuated in the 12th and 13th centuries, Christian municipalities developed the figure of the alfaqueques, or mediators who went to ransom these captives. The first legislative recognition of the alfaqueques on a national scale took place in the 13th century under Alphonse the Wise, a patron of translations in the so-called School of Toledo (Foz 1998).

As Alonso and Payás (2008) have pointed out, these cross-border mediators existed in the Iberian peninsula through the Middle Ages (the Alfaqueque Mayor post was abolished only in 1620, some 130 years after the Catholic monarchy had annexed Granada), and also in colonial America, with different names and functions, but always under the Crown’s authority. In both cases, knowing the languages concerned was a requisite for their appointment, and in both cases too, the job became hereditary (Alonso, Baigorri, and Payás 2008).

Once the Christian kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula had occupied the territories occupied by Muslim rulers for several centuries, their first natural zones of expansion were the North and West coasts of Africa, for instance under the Portuguese king Henry the Navigator (1394–1460). Commerce with the Arab world from the 7th and 8th centuries, the Islamization process, and the relations between 12th to 16th centuries African empires and kingdoms required interpreters in the region (Niang 1990: 34–5). Language mediators, sometimes traders themselves (Law 2004: 41), were also involved in the slave trade. A special type of interpreting was the intralingual oral translation performed by the Okyeame, “king’s linguists”, “professional linguists”, or griots
An interest in this figure was already shown in 1928 by Danquah, when he wrote about the laws and customs of Gold Coast (Ghana).

Referring to the Ashanti “linguists”, Danquah (1928: 42) points out that not only were they charged with repeating the words of their patron after him, acting as a herald to make it clear to all his audience and to add to his utterances the extra authority of remoteness, but they were also expected to “perfect” the speech of a chief who was not sufficiently eloquent, and to “elaborate his theme for him”. However, the “linguist” was not expected to add any new subject matter, but … he may extend the phrases and reconstruct the sentences and intersperse the speech with some of the celebrated witty and philosophical reflections for which they are justly celebrated to the credit of both himself and his chief.

(Bandia 1998: 295)

Kouraogo (2001: 115) prefers the term king’s linguist “because it focuses on the role of consecutive intra- or inter-lingual interpreter, while griot refers more to the bard, and guardian of the kingdom’s oral history”. I wish to emphasize this last role: custodians of the oral history – the only one that existed for a very long time, and not only in Africa. Sanon-Ouattara (2005: 16) refers to another form of translation performed by griots in pre-colonial Africa: the translation of drummed language, which played a special role, particularly in certain aspects of social and community life, such as births, deaths, funerals, and other events.

Centuries later, in post-apartheid South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission needed to give voice to all participants in its proceedings, many of whom spoke languages other than English or Afrikaans. An interpreter training and selection process was organized to cope with the situation, and journalists covering the event were also briefed on the particular challenges it posed (Hertog 2013). Because of the lack of equivalence among the myriad languages, interpreters resorted to age-old solutions such as paraphrasing in order to bridge communication gaps. But for these contemporary Okycame, it was impossible to convey innocuous-sounding English terms with anything but ugly realism. For example, one of the journalists reported that the term “third force” was rendered as “hairy arm”. He asked one of the interpreters why:

“During third force activities,” he explains, “people said a cuff sometimes moved too high up, and the exposed arm was always hairy – that means belonging to a white man.”

(Krog 1998: 14, as quoted by Hertog 2013: 79)

The Age of Discovery: Nahuatlatos and dragomans

In Columbus’ 1492 attempt to reach China and Japan (which ended up in the Caribbean islands), he took an interpreter in his expedition – with the wrong language combination (Kurz 1992) – and he kidnapped “Indian” children to teach them Spanish so they could interpret in future voyages, a medieval custom also used in Canada’s early colonial era as a precedent of interprètes-résidents (resident interpreters) (Delisle 1977). Alonso Araguás (2005) has studied the interpreters of the first “discovery” voyages to the Americas, based on archival material and secondary sources. In the early years of the conquest, Cortés’ interpreter, Doña Marina / La Malinche – studied, among others, by Karttunen (1994) – has been labeled everything from traitress to heroine. Her linguistic and diplomatic skills were instrumental for the conquest of Tenochtitlan by the Spaniards, and the Mexican “Indian” tradition considers her a turncoat. However, Doña Marina’s loyalties should be considered at the beginning of colonial Mexico, when “the categories of ‘Spaniard’ and
‘Indian’ and their correspondence to the terms conqueror and conquered have little meaning” (Yannakakis 2008: 6). Myth or literary fiction can only be removed, as Valdeón (2013: 176) suggests, if translation historians accept historical facts about her, and general historians “turn to translation studies to understand the complexity of the translational chain and all the nuances of her role as an intermediary”.

I will briefly focus here on the interpreting services established by the Spanish authorities in colonial America at the Audiencias, institutions with mixed judicial and executive powers, as the conquest advanced. The local interpreters were known by different titles, depending on the language spoken in the region. In Mexico they were called nahuatlatos, from “Nahuatl”, the main indigenous language spoken at the capital. It is worth mentioning that some 450 years before the European Union adopted directive 2010/64 on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings (see Official Journal of the European Union), Spanish colonial authorities adopted detailed legislation on interpreters, compiled in the Leyes de Indias (Laws of the Indies; the whole corpus is available in Spanish at the Archivo Digital de la Legislación en el Perú).

Interpreters must be present at all proceedings, hearings and prison visits.

We do hereby order that interpreters be present at court proceedings, hearings and prison visits every work day and that in the afternoon they render service at the home of the president or the judges. And so that this may be so, [interpreters] must carefully divide and assign their duties so that they cause no legal matter to be delayed or left pending, under penalty of two pesos for the poor for each day that they do not meet the aforementioned obligations, as well as damages, interest and costs to be paid to the party or parties who were detained as a result of their absence.

(Law IV, Ordinance 298 of 1563, in Giambruno 2008: 39)

This is just one example of the legal corpus, enacted from New Spain to the Strait of Magellan, that touched, inter alia, on training and accreditation and defined a professional code of ethics that, mutatis mutandis, would be applicable today. These laws responded to the Spanish authorities’ interest in preserving their “Indian” subjects’ communication rights to ensure fair trials, a symbolic implementation of jus gentium principles centuries before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), in the complex linguistic mosaic they faced. The Spanish Church and missionaries were keen on learning local languages, as they realized that autonomous translation and interpreting was the best way to serve their religious fervor. But heteronomous interpreters were often the only choice for the administration. The idea of spreading Spanish among indigenous peoples was encouraged, but measures during the 16th and 17th centuries were not very effective. As Yannakakis (2008) writes, interpreters continued to be essential for religious and administrative purposes in myriad indigenous languages, and the Spaniards’ mistrust of them did not go away.

Although Yannakakis quotes one correspondent as saying the languages had multiplied (2008: 175–6), in fact they had always been there. Derogative arguments about the “Indian” interpreters’ unsophisticated way of manipulating reality and resisting “civilization” confirm stereotypes about interpreters, who were easy scapegoats, particularly if they belonged to the Other’s side, and were accused of breaking their Crown-endorsed professional code of ethics. Measures demanding knowledge of Spanish by all subjects were to no avail. More than 200 years after Mexico’s independence, an amendment to the Mexican General Law on Linguistic Rights of Indigenous Peoples, passed by the Mexican Congress (Cámara de Diputados) in February 2010, urges the training and accreditation of language experts, including interpreters, in
indigenous languages that still survive (Diario Oficial de México, Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas’s catalogue 2008). This recent legal step recognizes that not all Mexican citizens or residents speak or understand Spanish, the official language.

In a different geopolitical context, the relations between Western European countries and the Ottoman Empire also required the use of interpreters, or dragomans as they were called, during the period between the 15th and the 20th centuries. Two scholars have recently gleaned historical records on dragomans from French and Venetian archives (respectively Balliu 2005, and Rothman 2009, 2012). Balliu touches on many linguistic issues in French-Ottoman empire relations, especially from the 16th to the 18th century, including the various attempts to serve France’s political and commercial interests in the Levant by training jeunes de langues [young linguists]. Joint initiatives were launched by the Crown at both ends – the Louis-le-Grand Institute in Paris and the Pera School in Constantinople – with financial aid from Marseilles merchants and academic cooperation from the Capuchin or Jesuit religious orders. The strategic value of having their own interpreters was based on France’s distrust of local eastern Mediterranean interpreters. Both initiatives (at Paris and Pera) failed, mostly due to “pedagogical improvisation” (Balliu 2005: 56). The training methods proved unsuitable for France’s intended purpose of securing a corps of faithful civil servants: not all candidates succeeded and some of those who did ended up working for the “enemy”.

Rothman developed the concept of trans-imperial subjects to characterize those intermediaries of variable contours, and the distinct profiles conventional interpreters and dragomans had in Venice beginning in the mid-sixteenth century.

Long before the office of Public Dragoman was institutionalized in Venice, interpreters were employed throughout the Venetian maritime empire where they facilitated communication with non-Italian-speaking populations.

(Rothman 2012: 166)

Venetian dragomans were an adaptation of the Ottoman Office of Grand Dragoman. Their multiple functions combined public and private activities, from translating and interpreting to spying, and from diplomatic negotiations to trade facilitation:

… to translate official letters sent to the doge by the sultan, as well as internal Ottoman correspondence intercepted by the Venetians; to accompany Ottoman dignitaries on official audiences and produce authoritative reports on such occasions; to travel to the Venetian-Ottoman borderlands to negotiate in border disputes; and, most frequently, to assist Ottoman and Safavid merchants in Venice …

(Rothman 2012: 170)

Ottoman Grand Dragomans were influential characters, who often acted as de facto ambassadors (ibid.: 166). Posts were frequently hereditary, so that we find the same family names for generations. The power they wielded entailed risks, and the cost for the mismanagement of certain affairs was imprisonment and even death.

Due to boundaries between disciplines, historians do not generally focus their research on interpreting or interpreters; elision of their role is the rule. It is therefore interpreters themselves who have to become “historians” of their own trade, even if they are untrained in historical methodology and skills. As a result, “despite the wealth of prosopographic studies on the dragomanate and biographical studies of individual dragomans and their families”, historians tend to overlook “dragoman’s practices of translation and mediation” (Rothman 2009: 772).
The 19th century: the Pacific Trail and the education of interpreters’ users

The two examples that illustrate this century represent a voyage of the late Enlightenment and a prelude to the “diplomacy by conference” era, which symbolically meant the end of the dragomans (Ryan 1951).

The Lewis and Clark expedition, or Corps of Discovery (1804–1806), was inspired by President Jefferson, who wished to promote exploration of the West beyond the Mississippi River. The aims of the expedition, mainly geographic and scientific, were achieved after a long voyage through the Rockies, reported by Lewis and Clark in their journals, where they wrote copiously and constantly, “sending back maps and physical samples of everything imaginable to support their written observations” (Karttunen 1994: 25). Sacajawea, a Shoshone woman, was one of the interpreters, or “interpretress” in Clark’s words (Nelson 2003: 8), that accompanied the expedition. Interest in her started quite early (Hebard 1907, 1933). Nelson has studied existing sources in detail, including those on Sacajawea’s husband and son, Toussaint and Jean-Baptiste Charbonneau, and claims she “proved a resourceful and hardy traveler as well as an interpreter, but except on rare occasions she was not a guide” (Nelson 2003: 10). Sacajawea could be a “topography” guide only in the limited areas she knew, but she sometimes also interpreted nature (Karttunen 1994: 28), as Dersu Uzala would do a century later for Russian military surveyor Arsenjev in the Asian Northeast. This showed the asymmetry in cultural and technical background between the expedition members – and also among them – and the different peoples on their way, who spoke such a variety of languages that sometimes only sign language was used, as with the Nez Perce Indians on the westward journey (Nelson 2003: 44-5). Lewis and Clark’s journals serve here as a primary source.

... by the assistance of the snake boy and our interpreters were enabled to make ourselves understood by them altho’ it had to pass through the French, Minnetare, Shoshone, and Chopunnish languages. The interpretation being tedious it occupied nearly half the day before we had communicated to them what we wished.

(Lewis, Sunday May 11th 1806, from Lewis and Clark 1804–1806)

The group’s external communication was always relayed (see Chapter 10 for more information on relay interpreting). Charbonneau shared the Hidatsa language with his wife and communicated with the expedition through a French-speaking member of the corps, and Sacajawea mediated between her husband and the Shoshones. On the occasion cited in the above quote, the homeward-bound mission needed four relays to establish contact with the same Nez Perce, who this time had a Shoshone intermediary (Nelson 2003: 57). Thinking briefly about this encounter, we can easily imagine what was lost in the mixed sign and oral interpreting process, possibly also affected by the etiquette the “Indians” would not do without. A quick flashback to the 17th–18th centuries Spanish-Mapuche parlamentos (Zavala 2000) confirms protocol requiring all Mapuche in the delegation to speak through interpreters, even if only to repeat what fellow members had said, a symbol of recognition of Mapuche alterity and irreducibility (Payàs, Zavala and Samaniego 2012: 73).

The origins of conference interpreting are frequently associated with the 20th century, but there were previous occasions, such as the 1890 Pan-American Conference, when interpreters were necessary for the smooth exchange of opinions in different languages. A participant at that conference wrote:

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One of the principal difficulties which arose in the Conference, and which, although apparently insignificant, had an influence that can hardly be appreciated, was caused by the different languages spoken by the delegates. … These circumstances made the services of interpreters indispensable. It is well known how difficult it is to translate a speech properly. Besides a perfect knowledge of the language in which it is delivered and of that into which it is translated, other conditions are required, which seldom are found in any one person, as, for instance, perfect familiarity with the subject matter of the speech, a very good memory, the ability not to forget any of the points made, and great facility of expression for the purpose of translating with correctness and precision, if not with elegance, the views expressed.

The difficulty of correct translations, which was felt more especially in the early sessions of the conference, caused the delegates of quick temper, when they did not understand the ideas expressed in the other language, to misinterpret them, and sometimes to consider them offensive and to give back sharp answers, which provoked sharp retorts, and not only disturbed the harmony among the delegates, but in some cases seemed even to threaten the success of the Conference.

(Romero 1890: 360–61)

It is an insightful description of what conference interpreting is about, by an observer and user, at a time when multilingual conferences were less frequent than they are now. This was a symmetric encounter of government representatives who shared knowledge of topics but not language. Interpreters were necessary not only in exploration journeys and in conference settings, but also at the United States entry points, where a corps of interpreters had to be established to assist immigration officials in their administrative tasks. Immigrants were arriving in the United States at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries in the tens of thousands every year. Many references can be found in the US press to the presence of interpreters at the interviewing procedures, for instance at the emblematic Ellis Island, where Fiorello Laguardia interpreted between 1907 and 1910 (Baigorri and Otero-Moreno 2012).

The past 100 years: technical revolutions, trials (and errors), and memoirs

The past 100 years have witnessed an enormous development of conference interpreting that started with consecutive, continued with in situ simultaneous, and is now in the process of developing an increasing presence of remote interpreting (see Chapters 5, 6, and 21 on simultaneous, consecutive, and remote interpreting, respectively). The past 100 years have required interpreters in wars and in subsequent peace processes and then in international tribunals to assign responsibility. The latter part of the past century has also seen a significant development of community or public service interpreting, as a result of transnational migrations and travel in an era of increased human rights awareness (see Chapters 12–16 on court, asylum, community, healthcare, and mental health interpreting, respectively.) Technology has also facilitated a significant increase in the number of interpretation users, for instance through media interpreting (see Chapter 18 on interpreting for the mass media). Concerning the profession’s sociology, the past 100 years have witnessed the birth of interpreting schools and professional associations, starting with AIIC in 1953 (see Chapters 2 and 3 on key internal and external players, respectively, and Chapter 25 on pedagogy).
The beginnings of simultaneous interpreting

The period between World War I and World War II was an era of splendor for consecutive interpreting, but during the 1920s proposals made by entrepreneur Edward Filene, with engineer Gordon Finlay’s cooperation, encouraged the testing of various instantaneous interpreting systems. Their main purpose was to save time by replacing consecutive (in which the same speech was repeated subsequently by interpreters in the other official language, English or French) with instant oral translation. Experiments started at the League of Nations (LON) in 1926, but the first training course in simultaneous, organized at the International Labour Organization (ILO), took place between February and May 1928, with six successful candidates ready to interpret in simultaneous mode at the next ILO general conference that year. The reaction by LON and ILO staff and freelance consecutive interpreters was generally negative, although the results were undeniably successful for the development of the meetings (Baigorri 2004 [2000]). Simultaneous interpreting as it was implemented at the ILO conference in 1928 can be seen as a metaphor for “modern times”, with microphones and headsets as forerunners of future sophisticated technologies, and as a sign of democratization by giving voice at that international organization to trade union representatives in their own languages. Until then, only employers and governments were in a position to send delegates who understood one of the two official languages, English and French.

Interpreting at the Nuremberg and Tokyo military tribunals

Simultaneous interpreting attracted the attention of the media for the first time in history at the military tribunals established by the Allied Powers to prosecute alleged war criminals from the defeated countries. Francesca Gaiba (1998) describes the intricacies of simultaneous interpreting at the main Nuremberg trial, where major Nazi war criminals were prosecuted. Simultaneous interpreting was being used for the first time at a court, and interpreters were recruited in a hurry. Perhaps that is why the court put in place “safety nets (stenographic records, electrical recordings of the proceedings and final revised versions of printed records) … to avoid any misinterpretation that could jeopardize the defendants’ fair treatment” (Baigorri 1999b: 512).

In contrast to what happened at Nuremberg, consecutive was the predominant mode of interpreting at the Tokyo Trial (Takeda 2010: 37). It is apparent that the novel three-tier system (in which interpreters were Japanese nationals, monitors were Japanese Americans or Nisei, and the language arbiter was a Caucasian US military officer who monitored interpreters’ performance) was introduced as the trial developed and translation problems occurred: as time passed, users got acquainted with the practice of interpreting, or “educated” through trial and error. Monitors also served here to “police” the interpreters, who were mostly Americans of Japanese descent and were viewed with suspicion by the United States, which ran the trial. The perceived – and real – difficulty of deciding allegiances in times of war for mixed or bicultural individuals is an element that, as Takeda points out, is still affecting interpreters in war situations these days:

The need to have every word spoken in Court translated from English into Japanese, or vice versa, has at least doubled the length of the proceedings. Translations cannot be made from the one language into the other with the speed and certainty which can be attained in translating one Western speech into another. Literal translation from Japanese into English or the reverse is often impossible. To a large extent nothing but a paraphrase can be achieved, and experts in both languages will often differ as to the
correct paraphrase. In the result, the interpreters in Court often had difficulty as to the rendering they should announce, and the Tribunal was compelled to set up a Language Arbitration Board to settle matters of disputed interpretation.

(Part A, Section I, “Establishment and Proceedings of the Tribunal”, in International Tribunal for the Far East, 1948, as quoted by Takeda 2010: 68)

Frequent mentions during the Tokyo Trial of the impossibility of translation between Japanese and English and vice versa are emblematic of the “lost in translation” metaphor, with its potential impact on the fairness of the trial. They also point to the true limits of producing full and instant equivalence in simultaneous interpreting, a challenge frequently experienced by professional interpreters, and not only in that language combination.

What’s in a photo: testing simultaneous interpreting at the United Nations (1947)

Photos are, like other sources, silent records, which have to be questioned if we want to use them to put together our version of history. Figure 1.1 shows an early United Nations (UN) official earphone distribution before the meeting of the Economic and Social Council. Lake Success, New York. 31 July 1947.

Figure 1.1 What’s in a photo: testing simultaneous interpreting at the United Nations (1947) Copyright © United Nations, 1947
photograph at a conference hall, graphic evidence of a simultaneous interpreting experiment. After Colonel Dostert (1904–1971) demonstrated its success at Nuremberg, he was invited to test the system at UN headquarters. This photo shows a rack with the relatively light – just over one pound – headsets and receivers that participants at the 1947 session of the UN Economic and Social Council needed to hear the interpreters during the meetings. The picture can be seen as an allegory of interpretation by ellipsis: interpreters are not present, not even visible in their booths, but headphones and receivers are shown as a representation of the profession. Perception of the device as something purely mechanical, devoid of human participation, is inferred when attending delegates “took theirs [the headsets] to the bar” (Saturday Evening Post, 12th August 1950: 115). The success of these experiments led to the adoption in 1947 of simultaneous interpreting as the regular interpretation mode at the UN, the one that has prevailed until now. The implementation process in technical and sociological terms was far from smooth, as it faced the consecutive interpreters’ resistance after they had monopolized the international interpreting establishment, with the exception of Nuremberg. They reacted against simultaneous mainly because they feared losing the prominence associated with their presence at the rostrum after speakers finished their speeches, and they felt threatened by the unknown “telephonic” technology. As a result, they claimed simultaneous was a low-quality, parrot-like exercise.

This contentious issue had an immediate administrative impact on the UN interpreters’ section (Baigorri 2004), but it also had other lasting effects if, by applying a historical perspective, we consider the creation of interpretation schools after World War II as the means that consecutive interpreters found to preserve part of their previous power, through their control of would-be interpreters’ training. I consider that the presence of consecutive interpreting as a necessary prerequisite to simultaneous in most interpreting schools and in the tests given by certain institutions, such as the European Union, originally stems from that initial control by former consecutive interpreters over the schools’ academic curricula in the 1950s.

**Let the facts speak for themselves: interpreters’ memoirs**

Memoirs are personal narratives in which authors recreate their private stories in retrospect. Thiéry (1985: 80) argued that interpreters should not write their memoirs even after their principals were dead, since that would violate confidentiality. The truth is that, beyond those concerns, the increasing number of memoirs published by interpreters in recent years is good news for historians. They are excellent sources of information to rebuild the history of interpreting, always subject to critical examination of sources. Memoirs are never neutral – in fact, self-justification of previous professional or personal behavior is often their major aim – and their market success is usually subordinate to the notoriety of the interpreters’ principals (from Churchill to Hitler, Mao or Stalin).

Many researchers feature brief biographies of interpreters in their works (Baigorri 2004; Torikai 2009; Takeda 2010). This exercise in recovering “voices of the invisible presence”, in Torikai’s words, can be seen as a vindication of memory through anamnesis. Two cases of full-length interpreters’ biographies are Widlund-Fantini’s (2007) insightful life story of Danica Seleskovitch, one of the most influential interpreters in the last 40 years, and Balliu’s (2008) less exhaustive biographic notes on another high-caliber interpreter, Christopher Thiéry.

In Ji Chaozou’s memoir *The Man on Mao’s Right* (2008), the preface, like those in which translators explain their method, is quite useful for our historical approach. Ji (b. 1929) spent his youth in New York with his family after they fled Japan-invaded China in 1937, and they returned to the post-revolution People’s Republic of China in 1950, when the Korean war erupted. He arrived in his country speaking very good English but with a need to improve his Chinese,
which he did. He made his career in the field of languages in the Chinese administration, and later became UN under-secretary general and then China’s ambassador in London.

His memoirs were published for a Chinese readership nine years before the 2008 version quoted here – adapted for an English-speaking audience with ghostwriter Foster Winans’s help. The title is a bit misleading: Ji was mostly premier Zhou En-lai’s rather than Mao’s regular interpreter. The book, a pretext to narrate China’s contemporary history, is a very valuable life story, with interesting episodes on Ji’s experience during the cultural revolution or as civil servant at the ministry. References to his professional language career, from verbatim reporter in Panmunjom (Korea) to staff translator and interpreter at the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, provide useful raw material for sociological research on those professions in contemporary China. A few lines in the preface will suffice to show the difficulty of harmonizing the trades of historian and interpreter.

Let the facts speak for themselves … I am unqualified as a true historian. … I have relied largely on recollection; the excellent memory and superior intelligence of my wife of fifty years, Wang Xiangtong; and the observations of the many colleagues and acquaintances with whom I worked or crossed paths. … I sometimes think of myself as having been a flea on the collar of events …

(Ji 2008: ix–x)

Facts never speak for themselves. Events become historical facts only when duly vetted by historians. To his credit, Ji honestly states he is no historian, but then, why write a history (“my goal was to demystify China and the Chinese people”, Ibid. xiv). Recollections – by the writer, close relatives or acquaintances – are a usual source of information in memoirs. But time tarnishes the mirror in which we look at our past selves, and when we narrate events in retrospect, facts, places, and dates may be distorted. So historians would do well to verify autobiographical narratives with other records, including archival material. Finally, the “flea on the collar of events” idea is a very appropriate description of the role interpreters play, as first-hand witnesses of events whose reins are in their principals’ hands. Ji’s remark on Mao’s indifference towards him, a mere “talking machine” (Ji 2008: 197), would confirm his feeling of merit unrecognized.

Remote interpreting from a historical angle

I said a few years ago (Baigorri 1999a) that after the simultaneous revolution, conference interpreting was undergoing a second revolution, namely remote interpreting (see Chapter 22). Throughout these years, various experiments in remote simultaneous interpreting have been carried out, at the United Nations and the European Union, among other places (Moser-Mercer 2003). At first sight, the remote simultaneous revolution has failed: remote has not replaced on-site interpreting as clearly as simultaneous replaced consecutive in conference settings. Let me venture some reflections on the comparison from a historical perspective.

When simultaneous interpreting came of age at Nuremberg, prevailing circumstances after World War II pushed strongly in favor of a quick prosecution of the defeated, accused of war crimes, conspiracy, crimes against humanity, etc. Their trial had to be quick because of the principle of “justice delayed, justice denied”. Furthermore, the massive loss of life and destruction in so many countries demanded physical but also symbolic reparations, that is, judging – condemning – the perpetrators of the crimes. With four main languages (English, Russian, French, and German) and given the number of defendants involved, consecutive interpreting
would have prolonged the trial by several years. The only solution available to expedite the administration of justice was simultaneous interpreting.

The case of remote simultaneous is quite different. First, there has been no Nuremberg milestone pressuring for an immediate change. Technology has evolved, and is evolving, at lightning speed in various directions: over-the-phone interpreting (OTP), video relay services (VRS) video relay interpreting (VRI), Skype, Google Hangouts, Adobe Connect, WebEx, GoToMeeting, and so on (Olsen 2012) (see Chapter 22). So the clear-cut boundary that existed in the 1940s between two separate systems does not exist now. Unlike the professional situation in 1945, when remote experiments began in 1970 (UN satellite connection between New York and Buenos Aires) there was a well-established corps of conference interpreters serving the international circuit, organized in associations, and willing to preserve their professional status and modus operandi. They also controlled interpreting schools, and their less-than-enthusiastic reaction to remote interpreting is reflected in curricula that do not encourage training in remote, but rather still echo the only-consecutive era. Compared with 1945, the interpreting demand and the variety of settings at national and international levels has grown exponentially, with new distinct market niches and separate bodies of interpreters. Finally, leadership of a potentially visionary project, in an era of internet-based network initiatives, is likely to be of a collective nature (in contrast to in situ simultaneous interpreting, which was “commissioned” by governments in one way or another and was channeled via a handful of schools in an era of analog technology). Collaboration platforms have not addressed the requirements “to provide simultaneous interpretation … at least not yet” (Olsen 2012), but the solution(s) of technology-dependent variables may be within reach.

Human factors, and particularly attitudes, have historically changed at a much slower pace than technologies. Despite early strong opposition by established conference interpreters (AIIC 2002), demand is pushing the use of remote in conference interpreting, to the extent that in 2009 it reached 3.1 and 2.1 percent of work days, for speakers and audience, respectively (Lucarelli 2011). Conference interpreting is not the only interpreting sector or the fastest-growing one. The over-the-phone system is present in large chunks of the market, including healthcare and court settings and, above all, private services companies. With increasingly sophisticated technologies, it will be interesting to observe if one or more “generation gaps” develop among different age groups in the profession – in various settings, not only in conference interpreting – regarding their perception of remote simultaneous. This chapter has shown that interpreters throughout history have had a great variety of functions. They have been dragged by the undercurrents of history to act as guides, as court interpreters, as diplomats, etc., and have proved to possess an almost innate ability to adapt to changing situations. Therefore, we can expect they will continue to adjust, as required by new professional environments.

Further reading


An innovative image-based research focused on the interpreter as a socially constructed category.


A collection of essays on the different roles played by local intermediaries, interpreters and clerks as cross-cultural brokers between different colonial administrations in Africa and the local populations.

24
A series of papers on the role of languages and language intermediaries in wars from the 18th century to present-day conflicts.

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KEY INTERNAL PLAYERS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTERPRETING PROFESSION

Julie Boéri

Introduction

Interpreting has evolved across time and space out of the influence of a myriad of players. This chapter sets out to explore the development of the interpreting profession from within. Adopting a relational and dynamic approach to the development of interpreting, it examines the unequal and changing power that internal players exert in shaping the ways in which interpreting is theorized, practised, provided, learnt and taught in our societies, and in so doing, in developing the interpreting profession.

The development of the profession has been a matter of concern in interpreting studies (Tseng 1992; Fenton 1993; Pollitt 1997; Agger-Gupta 2001; Mikkelsen 1999, 2004; Ozolins 2000; Wadensjö et al. 2007; Swabey and Gajewski Mickelson 2008). This is not surprising, given that our fairly recent discipline was born out of the very rationale of turning this ancestral, societal practice into a recognized profession. In her foreword to the Proceedings of the fourth Critical Link Conference which addressed the “professionalization of interpreting in the community” (Sweden, 2004), Wadensjö sketches various lines of action taken by interpreting players:

People working with interpreting in various spheres of society and various parts of the world are now involved in a process of professionalization. This implies a range of individual and collective efforts, including struggles to achieve a certain social status, suggestions to define standards of best practice, to control access to professional knowledge – theoretical and practical skills – and to control education and work opportunities.

(Wadensjö 2007: 2)

Wadensjö’s several references to “control” in the short excerpt above draw attention to the dynamics of power that underpin most processes of professionalization; an aspect that has remained scarcely studied in the case of the interpreting profession. In fact, the most widespread and intuitive approach to the development of the profession has consisted of identifying the key characteristics of other occupations that have reached the status of a profession and using them as
a point of reference for interpreting to achieve the same positive fate. The typical characteristics (or factors) that have been identified and largely addressed are:

- A set of moral values and principles established in a Code of Ethics;
- Standards of Best Practice, providing practitioners with guidance on how to implement the Code of Ethics on the ground in practice;
- A consensual definition of role and function: practitioners identify with a joint distinctive character as a professional community. This is what I refer to throughout this chapter as “professional ethos”;
- A body of theoretical and practical knowledge as well as formal training programmes;
- A system of licensure, registration or accreditation;
- An interpreting industry conformed with by relevant sector agencies;
- A professional body that is representative of practising interpreters;
- An established governmental and/or institutional interpreting policy.

The means to achieve these goals have been addressed by an alternative and complementary approach, put forward by Tseng (1992), which consists of exploring the development of the profession as a cyclical process and a collective effort that involves several players such as the labour market, the state, professional associations, practitioners, etc. Tseng’s (1992: 43) model of professionalization, created for his case study on the emergence of the conference interpreting profession in Taiwan, and applied since then to other areas of interpreting (Fenton 1993; Pollitt 1997; Mikkelson 1999, 2004; Witter-Merithew and Johnson 2004), is decomposed into four phases of development:

- market disorder
- consensus and commitment among practitioners
- emergence of a strong professional association
- political leverage

Shifting the focus from professions’ characteristics, Tseng foregrounds both the external control (on private, state institutions or users) and the internal control (over practitioners, trainers, trainees, etc.) that occupational groups increasingly exert as they progress towards professionalization.

This chapter adopts Tseng’s relational and dynamic approach but with a sharp focus on players, on their varying perspectives, and their unequal and changing power, rather than on stages of development. This is because its purpose is not to look at the success or failure of specific occupational groups in reaching a specific stage of professionalization, but to explore the overlapping and competing perspectives on the development of the profession among players within the interpreting field. This analysis focuses specifically on “internal players”; i.e. professional bodies as well as training and research institutions, practitioners, scholars and educators, leaving aside “external players”, such as clients and users, dealt with elsewhere (Chapter 3 in this volume).

The core of this chapter examines the control wielded by professional bodies over the market. It focuses on two specific professional bodies which have regulated the interpreting market, professional standards and access to education, in the domains of conference interpreting (see the section “Conference interpreting: the case of AIIC”) and sign language interpreting (see the section “Sign language interpreting in the US: the case of the RID”). These two bodies are the International Association of Conference Interpreters (abbreviated under its French acronym, AIIC) and the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) in the US. Against this backdrop of two overlapping and diverging systems of professionalization, the chapter moves on to discussing recent
developments in the interpreting community with a particular focus on individuals players such as practitioners, researchers, and educators (“Current issues and debates”) and opens up to future directions in interpreting studies (“Recommendations and future directions”).

**Conference interpreting: the case of AIIC**

Although there are many professional associations of conference interpreters across the world to date, AIIC, which was founded in Paris in 1953, was and remains the main interlocutor of the conference interpreting (CI) profession in the world, given its fast and wide membership expansion across the non-communist world in the mid-20th century and its historical relationship with the most important employers of conference interpreters (see Chapter 3 on external players).

**Lobbying stakeholders**

Several instruments were used by AIIC to enforce respect for interpreters’ working conditions among stakeholders, in both the public and private markets.

In the private market, one such instrument was the rule of the “direct contract” (Keiser 1999: 84-85). It obliged any end-client to directly contract individual interpreters, thus preventing intermediaries (particularly congress organizers) from making a profit on interpreting services provision. In a context of lower supply than demand for interpreters, and of clients’ relative lack of knowledge about simultaneous interpreting, and given the non-existence at the time of electronic communication platforms to locate interpreters, the direct contract rule turned AIIC into a safe and free-of-charge recruiting ground.

However, “AIIC’s practice of unilaterally deciding and imposing standard rates”, in Keiser’s words, “was increasingly hard to accept” among stakeholders (87; my translation from French). Aware of the risk that stakeholders might increasingly look for non-AIIC interpreters, the association entered a phase of negotiation, flexibilized the “direct contract” rule, then abandoned it in 1971, and finally concluded agreements in the congress organizing industry in 1985 (op. cit).

As for the public market, AIIC’s main instrument to enforce respect for interpreters’ working conditions has been and continues to be collective agreements with the most important intergovernmental employers of freelance interpreters, mainly the UN and the EU institutions. These agreements consisted in leveraging freelance interpreters’ labour rights to those of civil servant interpreters: remuneration, working conditions, health insurance, etc. (Baigorri-Jalón 2000). Signed as early as 1969, they have been since then re-negotiated and re-conducted every five years, as evidenced in AIIC’s website section on the sectors with which the association presently negotiates agreements, including the European Union, the Global Union Federations, the United Nations, the World Customs Organization (AIIC n.d.). In the post-World War II socio-economic context, AIIC was thus empowered to regulate the labour market by acting as a trade union and, to the extent that it was the unique interlocutor of the profession, as a free-of-charge interpreters’ agency. However, several court cases against the association in Canada (1982), in Germany (1986) and then in the US (1992–1997), marked a tipping point in the history of AIIC and are revelatory of the loss of regulatory power of professional bodies with the expansion of a neoliberal market economy (Keiser 1999: 88).

In fact, AIIC’s endeavour to improve interpreters’ welfare fell under anti-trust law on the grounds that it is not a trade union (exempted from anti-trust scrutiny) but a professional association: “respondents [AIIC] exist for the profit of their members” (FTC 1996: 113). As attested to by its motto, the primary mission of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is to “protect
America’s consumers” by preventing anti-competitive business practices. It is in this capacity that it alleged that AIIC regulatory “scheme deprived consumers of the benefits of price and other forms of competition among interpreters” (ibid.). Providing evidence of the close connection between the curtailing of competition among interpreters and the hindering of end-users’ access to professional services, the FTC’s decision against AIIC was upheld on appeal (FTC 1997). Except for the agreements with the public sector, which remained unaffected by the decision (Keiser 1999: 88), all of AIIC’s binding rules were turned into recommendations.

**Control of practitioners**

As early as 1957, AIIC adopted a Code of Professional Ethics, whose basic tenet was (and remains) absolute respect for working conditions, in addition to confidentiality and a commitment to excellence. These remain the basic tenets of AIIC’s Code of Ethics as it stands at the time of writing this chapter (AIIC 2002).

AIIC established a standard rate which, until 1992, had to be strictly applied by all members anywhere in the labour market (Keiser 1999: 83). AIIC also established the principle of “same responsibility, same remuneration”, thus enforcing equality of conditions regardless of gender differences (a lively issue in the early days of the association) and regardless of level of experience. As argued by Keiser, this principle deterred employers from looking for less experienced and more economical interpreters and, in so doing, had the effect of “strongly discouraging the ‘prima donnism’, so frequent in professions involving other forms of interpretation” (ibid.: 85), by which he means “musicians, authors, actors, etc.” (ibid.: 84; my translation from French).

Another rule intended to curtail competition from novice interpreters is AIIC’s restrictive policy on pro bono interpreting. In fact, prior to the FTC ruling, article 13 of the Code of Ethics stipulated that “members of the Association can provide services for free, provided that they cover their travel and subsistence costs (unless they are granted an exceptional waiver by the Council)” (Keiser 2005; my translation from French). Although this policy seems to apply to AIIC interpreters only, the FTC investigation provided evidence of the influence that AIIC wields in the labour market to enforce this policy beyond AIIC interpreters. Focusing on the particular case of the 1984 Olympics, the FTC came to the following conclusion:

> When the organizers of the 1984 Olympic games wanted to use student interpreters and pay for their airfare from Monterey, California to Los Angeles, they ran afoul of AIIC’s limits of free charitable work, which require members who provide their services free of charge to pay for their own travel expenses and subsistence. “AIIC’s restrictions on pro bono work deter entry by novice interpreters working without charge,” Judge Timony said. “Absent the rule, student or novice interpreters could seek to work without charge in order to gain experience and make contacts in the profession.”

*(FTC 1996)*

The article restricting pro bono work was then removed by AIIC, and today’s professional standards stipulate, under article 5, that

> Whenever members of the Association provide their services free of charge for conferences of a charitable or humanitarian nature, they shall respect the conditions laid down in the Code of Professional Ethics and in these Professional Standards.

*(AIIC 2012)*
In short, non-remunerated interpreting should be governed by respect for working conditions, excellence, and impartiality. There is no longer any reference to the covering of costs by interpreters themselves.

Another AIIC policy that regulates competition among interpreters is that of the professional address. When they work on a paid basis, interpreters are banned from covering their travel and subsistence expenses, which must be charged to the client. AIIC interpreters shall have only one professional address, the one declared and published in the AIIC Directory, and “any change in professional address from one region to another shall not be permitted for a period of less than six months” (ibid.).

Until AIIC lost the FTC case, its rules were enforced “with penalties for breach, including warning, reprimand, suspension and expulsion … Members charged with violating the rules have been investigated and penalized, or have resigned”, as stated in the FTC Initial Decision (1996: 120). However, non-AIIC members have also been pressured to abide by AIIC’s rules, given their reliance on sponsors and referees to get to work: another mechanism of enforcement of the rules which the FTC Administrative Law Judge, James P. Timony identified:

AIIC also used rumour and blacklisting to secure members’ adherence to the rules. Interpreters feared being labelled as undercutters. … When interpreters deviated from the AIIC rules, they kept their agreement secret, for fear of retaliation by other interpreters … . Conference interpreters rely on their colleagues for referrals. Interpreters fear being blacklisted by colleagues because much of their referral work comes from other interpreters.

(FTC 1996: 121)

Another policy underpinning this “referral” system is that of AIIC membership. As it stands at the time of writing this chapter (AIIC 2002) and as it stood in 1996 (FTC 1996: 15–16), this policy makes candidates reliant on the willingness of AIIC colleagues to vouch for their observance of AIIC rules and regulations. Once they have secured their sponsors and can prove that they have sufficient experience, their application is processed and their name is published in the AIIC Bulletin. Then, for a specific period, candidates may be challenged by AIIC members on their respect for AIIC rules. This policy has undergone some slight changes since 1996. Nowadays, the number of sponsors may decrease from five to three according to language combinations and regions, the minimum number of days of work experience has decreased from 200 to 150 days and the period during which they can be challenged by other AIIC members has decreased from 200 to 60 days (AIIC 2002). Nevertheless, the sponsorship system still prevails, and grants AIIC members the role of gatekeepers of the association and guardians of respect for professional standards.

**Lobbying schools**

While formal training is not required to apply for AIIC membership, the association has been proactive on this strategic front of professionalization.

As early as 1959, AIIC established a “school policy” (Keiser 1999) which, at the time, consisted of urging the designers of training programmes to abide by a set of criteria (listed by AIIC Schools Committee, later renamed AIIC Training Committee), in exchange for granting them the association’s recognition (ibid.).

As the decades have passed, AIIC’s school policy has shifted from official recognition in the 60s – the schools belonging to CIUTI (the Conference of University-Level Translator and Interpreter Schools) or the European Masters in Conference Interpreting (EMCI) network
being two cases in point – to the mere listing of criteria-complying schools in AIIC’s School Directory (AIIC Training Committee 2010). Periodically updated since 1959, these recommendations “officially became the yardstick by which the profession rated training standards” (Mackintosh 1999: 72). They state that: “courses should be designed and taught by practising conference interpreters whose language combinations are recognized by AIIC or by an international organization” and interpreting should be taught at postgraduate level (AIIC Training Committee 2010; my emphasis). Earlier versions of the document, which are no longer available on AIIC’s website but are traceable in De Manuel’s (2010) critical review of AIIC training recommendations, required AIIC-accredited interpreters to be involved not only in curriculum design and course instruction, but also in access to training (aptitude tests) and final examinations. They also required that programme curricula should correspond to market demands, thus downplaying the role that the university might play in covering communication needs that lie outside the conference interpreting market:

Access to training, final examinations, curriculum design, and course instruction, should be in the hands of practising interpreters whose language combinations – at least in the case of teachers and curriculum designers – are recognized by AIIC or by international organizations. … The language combinations offered as part of the regular curriculum reflect market requirements.

(AIIC Training Committee in De Manuel 2010: 137; translation from Spanish by Maria-Constanza Guzmán and Rosalind Gill)

It is worth commenting that two alternative training-related policies had been considered but discarded very early in the history of the association: (a) accepting the entry of graduates from recognized programmes, or (b) launching an AIIC international entrance exam for graduates (Keiser 1999: 90).

The abandoning of the entrance exam is regretted by Keiser (ibid.: 89), who considers that it would have empowered AIIC to grant (and in so doing, protect) the title of conference interpreter. Instead, it is AIIC members themselves who are entrusted with the role of gatekeepers, since it is they who vouch for candidates within the sponsorship system. Within such a system, criteria for entering the labour market do not exclusively rest upon quality, given that candidates are also judged on their respect for AIIC working conditions on the market and that there are necessarily competition issues between potential candidates and their potential sponsors.

SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETING IN THE US: THE CASE OF THE RID

The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) was founded in 1965 in the US to maintain a registry of qualified sign language interpreters for improving communication access for deaf, hard of hearing, and deaf-blind individuals, hereafter referred to as the “deaf community” (see Chapter 7 for a further discussion of terminology). In contrast to AIIC, which was created by practising and remunerated interpreters who self-identified as “professionals”, the RID was the initiative of mostly non-deaf educators or administrators (Cokely 2000) who could and did interpret but who “did not think of themselves as interpreters” (Fant 1990: 7) and who were holding full-time jobs in addition to their interpreting tasks.

**Remuneration**

As Cokely (2005: 2) reports, before the 70s, Sign Language Interpreting (SLI) “was seen as a voluntary and charitable activity that fell to those non-deaf persons with some level of
competence in sign language”. Sign language interpreters perceived interpreting as an act of civil engagement for the benefit of the deaf community: “we did not expect to be paid, we did not ask to be paid because we did not do it for the money. We felt it was our obligation, our duty to do it, and if we did not do it, the deaf person would suffer and we would feel responsible” (Fant 1990: 10).

Interestingly, the RID had no intention, at least at the time of its foundation, to change this situation, as conveyed by Lou Fant’s personal account of the creation of the Registry:

“we did not expect to be paid, we did not ask to be paid because we did not do it for the money. We felt it was our obligation, our duty to do it, and if we did not do it, the deaf person would suffer and we would feel responsible” (Fant 1990: 10).

Thus, contrary to what could have been expected, it is not the creation of the RID in 1965 that was to turn SLI into a regular and remunerated profession. According to Cokely (2005: 13), this shift in interpreters’ status was sparked by full-time employment opportunities in the 70s, in the wake of new legislation for the deaf community: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1973 established increased access for the deaf to public services (particularly public colleges and universities) and, on a less positive note, the 1975 Education of All Handicapped Children’s Act provided for their “assimilation” into mainstream society. As argued by Cokely, this second text “fosters the illusion of educational access and equality” (ibid.: 12) but sparked the slow decline of residential schools (where deaf children were learning within their linguistic community) and the enrolment of deaf children in mainstream schools, making the involvement of an interpreter indispensable.

Sign language interpreters became an essential link in this newly configured relationship between public services and the deaf community. Consequently, the 70s were marked by a dramatic growth in the demand for interpreters, particularly in primary and secondary schools. If the emergence of an SLI labour market was encouraged by external players (see Chapter 3), practising interpreters and the RID unsurprisingly welcomed this opportunity to earn a living from their work.

Thus, the RID played a rather passive role in converting interpreting into a regular and paid activity. However, it did have a primary role in determining who would be a qualified interpreter (through certification) and which principles should guide interpreting practice (through a Code of Ethics).

**Certification**

It was the deaf community that had historically determined whether and when someone possessed sufficient communicative competence according to how they functioned in the communicative exchange, the trustworthiness they demonstrated, and the serving of the deaf community interests. With the creation of the Registry, members of the RID replaced members of the deaf community in vouching for interpreters, through the early implementation of a membership application policy similar to AIIC. Applicants had to be supported by two RID members, but unlike AIIC, the emphasis was on vouching for candidates’ skills rather than for their respect for working conditions. In the context of increased needs for sign language interpreters and growing membership (500 members in 1974, 2000 in 1980), the weaknesses of this peer recommendation system of application became apparent, as “newer members were unable to sustain a level of quality that was acceptable to the community” (Cokely 2005: 7).
To address this problem, the RID launched a national testing programme in 1972, aimed at certifying interpreters in interpreting, in either American Sign Language (the language of the deaf community in the US), or in English-Like-Signing, i.e. transliteration. According to Cokely (2005: 8), the lack of research on interpreters’ assessment at the time and the testing situation itself – i.e. demonstrating competence and trustworthiness to examiners at a single point in time, instead of a process over time, in real situations with users – brought about uneven results in terms of both guaranteeing the skills of RID credential-holders and upholding the deaf community’s standards.

In the 1980s, the relationship between the RID and the deaf community, represented by the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), became increasingly strained, as attested by the fact that the NAD started to implement certification testing and had its own Code of Ethics for interpreters (Swabey and Gajewski Mickelson 2008). At the turn of the century, this relationship between the two organizations evolved towards fruitful collaboration, as attested by the joint development of the National Interpreter Certification (NIC) at the end of the 1990s (RID 2011).

For a long time, however, interpreters working with deaf children and teenagers in primary and secondary education settings lacked certification or any other credentials (see Chapter 17 on interpreting in education). This is paradoxical when one bears in mind that educational interpreters represent more than half of the population of interpreters (Burch 2002). Lack of certification “led to the perception that those working in K-12 [primary and secondary schools] settings represented the least competent among us” (Cokely 2005: 22). This hierarchy of markets/ settings translated into the feeling among K-12 interpreters that “RID is for interpreters who interpret for adults, not children” (RID n.d. b).

Given the weight of the educational sector and the strategic front that education represents for the deaf community’s rights, the RID recently endeavoured to welcome this population of interpreters into its organization. In 2006, for example, it began to recognize as certified members of the Registry those practitioners who took the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (the EIPA) written and performance tests and scored 4.0 and higher (ibid.). The EIPA was a test designed in-house in the 90s to cover the lack of a method for evaluating the skills of K-12 interpreters.

FROM CODE OF CONDUCT TO CODE OF ETHICS

Another front on which the RID has been proactive is that of establishing a Code of Conduct (see Chapter 20 on ethics). As argued by Cokely (2000) in his critical discussion of the RID Code of Ethics, the codifying of the boundaries and guidelines of the work of interpreters serves a double purpose: (1) it establishes a context within which the profession wishes the general public to perceive interpreters’ work and (2) it provides a mean for practitioners to be united around a common mission and ideals as well as guidelines on how to attain them. The RID’s Code of Ethics is particularly interesting as a case study of the development of the interpreting field, given its progressive history of change and development (Swabey and Gajewski Mickelson 2008) and its influence beyond the USA, particularly in the Codes of the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters, the Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada and the Massachusetts Medical Interpreters Association, which emulated and imitated it (Cokely 2000).

RID’s first Code of Ethics was established as early as 1965 and, like AIIC’s Code, outlined the principles of confidentiality, impartiality, faithfulness, and excellence, but with a different stance on working conditions (item 6):
The interpreter shall use discretion in the matter of accepting compensation for services and be willing to provide services in situations where funds are not available. Arrangements should be made on a professional basis for adequate remuneration in court cases comparable to that provided for interpreters of foreign languages.

(Swabey and Gajewski Mickelson 2008: 72)

Interpreters are urged to adapt their fees or occasionally work on a pro bono basis in case of scarce resources, which stands in contrast to arguably more “professionalized” interpreting sectors. This seems consistent with the view of interpreting as an act of civic engagement, which can also be seen in item 12:

The interpreter shall take the responsibility of educating the public regarding the deaf whenever possible, recognizing that many misunderstandings arise because of the general lack of public knowledge in the area of deafness and communication with the deaf.

Thus, even though the RID Code urges the interpreter to “maintain an impartial attitude during the course of his interpreting, avoiding interjecting his own views” (item 2), which shifts away from the advocacy role that interpreters had historically fulfilled within the deaf community, it does frame interpreters as “allies” of the deaf community by establishing a duty to protect it and to redress the general public misperception of deaf people.

In 1978/1979, the Code was reformulated into eight one-sentence tenets covering more or less the same principles as in the original version but with two important differences. The responsibility of interpreters towards supporting the cause of the deaf community disappears and the reference to remuneration is considered as a compensation that interpreters/transliterator shall request “in a professional and judicious manner” (item 5). Remuneration, albeit maintaining the discretion established in the 1965 version, gets closer to becoming the norm. In this sense, the 1978/1979 revisions seem to codify a shift away from the community, in keeping with the 70s legislation referred to earlier, as the interpreter’s profile shifted from a volunteer advocate of the deaf community to an impartial, remunerated professional.

Interestingly, the NAD, which at the time had its own Code of Ethics for interpreters, established respect for the deaf person’s rights and the duty of interpreters to serve as a resource for deaf people (Hoza 2003). This is reincorporated, however, in the major revisions of the text in 2005, jointly carried out by the NAD and RID. As Swabey and Gajewski Mickelson argue, by moving from a duty- or rule-based approach to a more rights-based approach, the Professional Code of Conduct embraces a more “holistic look at the guiding principles, application and decision making” (2008: 61). For further discussion on ethics, see Chapter 20.

**Education policy**

The RID establishes a continuous education programme to ensure that their members keep up with the evolution of professional knowledge. Once RID interpreters pass the test and are accredited, they must maintain their certification through (1) maintaining RID membership, (2) applying NAD-RID Code of Professional Conduct, and (3) meeting Continuing Education Units requirements by enrolling in college courses, independent studies, RID-sponsored workshops, non-RID conferences or seminars (RID n.d. a).

The RID also establishes standards for certifying education programmes. As in the case of AIIC, which requires schools to employ teachers with languages accredited by AIIC, sign
language training programmes are required to involve certified interpreters in the faculty and to have language fluency as a prerequisite to the interpreting training. Unlike AIIC, however, the focus of these recommendations is more explicit as regards the training pedagogy and the valorization of research in training. This may be due to the fact that the RID has been working collaboratively with several stakeholders within the Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education (CCIE). This commission was founded in 2006 to promote professionalism in the field of sign language interpreter education through the process of accreditation. In a nutshell, as established in the CCIE Accreditation Standards (CCIE 2010), the curricular philosophy should be grounded on a sociolinguistic approach to the deaf and hearing communities and a skills-based pedagogy; contents should range from professional to research, liberal arts, and social sciences. Sign language education standards are thus negotiated among a diversity of players, which is a promising sign that not only professional but also societal interests are defended in the process.

**Current issues and debates**

Accounting for the development of the profession, however, requires opening up the scope of analysis beyond mainstream institutions and including (groups of) interpreters whose position is rather peripheral in our field (be they professional, ad hoc, novice, volunteer, and/or activist interpreters), but who do engage with the role of our profession in society. In fact, the power wielded by key internal players on several fronts such as market regulation, training, or ethics necessarily unleashes dynamics of counter-power.

**Market regulation**

The power that AIIC has exerted in regulating interpreting in interaction with stakeholders and practitioners has not gone without resistance and opposition within the interpreting community. These dynamics of power and counter-power have become increasingly visible to the public with the proliferation of information and communication technology tools.

For example, public institutions’ occasional reliance on AIIC interpreters to vouch for skills of potential candidates whose language combination is not covered by public examination, or for the rejection of interpreters’ application on the ground that they are not members of AIIC, were reported on the public discussion forum of Babels (the international network of volunteer translators and interpreters, composed of both professionals and non-professionals). The discussion highlighted the internal conflict among interpreters fuelled by the fact that AIIC quite problematically keeps wielding the power of a trade union, a professional association, and a market regulator (Babels 2006).

Internal tensions also emerged with respect to the private market in relation to the provision of interpreters for the Universal Forum of Cultures, a major event which involved 120 interpreters for 5000 days of work between May and September 2004, in the city of Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain). The fact that an AIIC interpreter was appointed to organize and select interpreters for the event without any bidding process (a legal obligation when public money is involved), together with the fact that more than half of the selected team came from abroad, and that longstanding Barcelona-based, non-AIIC interpreters’ applications had been declined, sparked a battle that went public on an online article of *El País Catalonia supplement* (Riu 2004).

**Training**

Training has also become a front of shifting power dynamics among players. The rising legitimacy of professional players in constructing and disseminating knowledge about interpreting practice in
nascent interpreting programmes of the mid-20th century had the effect of shifting interpreters’ profiles as well as their connexions to the community and to the profession.

The emerging figure of the “professional interpreter” between the 50s and the mid-70s – perceived as formally trained in vocational programmes, themselves led by recognized practitioners within academic institutions – sparked a generational shift in interpreting. This shift relegated *natural interpreting* (see Chapter 26) to history and sparked the emergence of the *professional, expert* interpreting profile (Mackintosh 1999; also see Chapter 1). No longer conceptualized as an art, as a gift awakened through the life experience of migrations, diaspora and multilingualism, or community-belonging, interpreting became a technique that can be acquired in schools.

Donovan (2011) argues that academia has not taken over interpreting training programmes and that “in many instances, professional interpreters have managed to maintain or gain control of new university-based courses” (*ibid.*, 121), not only in the pioneering interpreting schools but also in more recent training programmes such as the EMCI, which are largely taught by full-time professionals. In this context:

> Training is perceived as a commitment to the upholding of quality, professional standards and conditions. It explicitly aims to transmit a certain vision of the profession and is thus closely bound up with socialization. In such a context, codes of practice are not so much discussed as explained and justified.

*(Donovan 2011: 127)*

This tends to suggest that the vocational and market-oriented approach to training that is central to AIIC training paradigm (see “Conference interpreting: the case of AIIC”) largely prevails in CI programmes.

However, outside of conference interpreting programmes that are geared towards supplying interpreters for high employability market sectors, training has been largely provided by “practisearchers” – that is, interpreting practitioners holding an academic position – or by a team of both professionals and scholars. Since the academization of interpreting, the successive paradigms and schools of thought (see Chapter 4) bearing on interpreting didactics have shown increased autonomy from the organized profession and increased reflexivity over educational issues of curriculum design and planning in interpreter training (see Chapter 24 on pedagogy.)

Despite interpreter education progress, many interpreters arrive on the job from rather unconventional tracks, showing that the acquisition of skills through life circumstances, on the ground in interpreting practice and in interaction with the communities as well as the institutions they serve, has not been replaced by the academization of interpreting.

This is evidenced in Boéri’s (2012) study of *ad hoc* interpreting situations, which she defines as “interpreting initiatives that take place in a context which cannot be catered for by conventional services for reasons that may be geopolitical, socio-economic and/or socio-professional” (121). Within these situations, an interpreters’ profile cuts across the professionally-established categories of “natural”, “novice”, “expert”, and “professional”, and they learn their skills within a collective, situational, and dynamic process. This process is not controlled by interpreting institutions, but emerges in interaction and negotiation with the communities they serve. (See Chapter 26 on non-professional interpreters for further discussion.)

*Ad hoc* interpreting learning (Boéri 2010), which has occupied a rather marginal place in interpreting studies, is thus a fertile ground for rethinking the development of interpreting beyond the mainstream and beyond the most institutionalized sectors of the interpreting community, and training interpreters not only for the market but also for society at large (Boéri and De Manuel 2011).
Ethics

Ethics also constitutes a key front of professionalization that is being negotiated across players of the interpreting community. While there has been much debate over ethics and role in interpreting studies, and despite the fact that the “conduit” normative claim has supposedly been questioned in interpreting studies, both scholars and professionals tend to perceive interpreters’ involvement in the communication encounter as restricted to discourse, that is, as “changing language structures and making cultural adjustments within the language in these encounters” (Roy 2002: 351) or as a mere rearrangement of the target discourse (Donovan 2011: 117). This is a restricted view of ethics and role that future generations are likely to be socialized into through training programmes.

In their day-to-day practice, though, interpreters appear to play a much larger role. Even in the area of CI, where these issues are not explicitly discussed, Donovan (2011) finds that interpreters do reflect upon the ethical implications of working for specific clients, such as the Front National (the French far-right party) when it gained seats at the European Parliament. She also finds that female interpreters may choose to tone down sexual insults to avoid giving them an uncomfortable visibility within a primarily male communication encounter.

The interpreter’s role, thus, tends to go far beyond what is established in codes of ethics and the professional ethos that interpreters assume in their meta-discourse (Zwischenberger and Pöchhacker 2010). This is particularly so in frictional encounters (Bahadir 2010; Inghilleri 2008, 2012). For example, Erik Camayd-Freixas, a certified interpreter for US Federal Courts, publicly denounced (2008a, 2008b) the flaws of a mass processing of illegal immigrants working in a meat plant in Postville, Iowa, who were charged with aggravated identity theft. He reported the interdependence between the prosecutor and the judge, the violation of the presumption of innocence, as well as an excessively expeditious proceeding that made the cultural gap between these immigrants (from rural areas) and the legal US culture irreconcilable. Faced with a conflict of interest between his own morality and the professional obligation of confidentiality, he was first tempted to abandon the interpreting assignment, but finally considered himself a privileged witness of this trial and a citizen with a duty to alert the appropriate jurisdictional services and public opinion. Not surprisingly, this choice was met with criticism in professional circles, where the view of interpreters as conduit still prevails (for further discussion of this case, see Morris 2010).

Inghilleri (2012) discusses the dilemmas that interpreters are prone to experience in frictional encounters due to the contrast between their professional principles and individual conscience that emerges in the interpreting exchange. She explores the tension between an interpreter’s “personal” and “professional” morality (ibid.: 70–71) and suggests how ongoing debates in interpreting studies may be resolved within the legal field, where questions of impartiality are central to “ensuring equal justice for all” (ibid.: 53).

Last but not least, recent developments in activist interpreting (Boéri in press) show that ethics is revisited beyond the realm of the interpreting encounter and extends to the very ways in which our profession is configured, theorized and taught (Boéri and De Manuel 2011). In this connection, the 2007 Declaration of Granada, adopted at the 1st International Forum on Translation/Interpreting and Social Activism, calls for scholars, professionals, teachers, and students to put their knowledge at the service not only of the market, but of society as a whole, to boycott interpreting activities in wars of occupation, to promote linguistic diversity in the field and beyond and, finally, to build a more inclusive and mutually supportive community of translators and interpreters (Boéri and Maier 2010: 156–7). (See Chapter 20 for a more extended discussion of ethics.)
Thus, while professional bodies are no doubt driving forces in the regulation of the market and the profession, practitioners, trainers and researchers, with varying values, interests and positional power, do exercise an influence over the development of interpreting.

**Recommendations and future directions**

Both AIIC and RID have been key players in the regulation of the market, the profession and access to education, and have exercised a powerful influence in their respective domains. As can be inferred from the sections “Conference interpreting: the case of AIIC” and “Sign language interpreting in the US: the case of the RID”, both AIIC and RID have shaped what may be regarded as two distinct systems of regulation.

Acting as a trade union, a commission-free agency, and a professional association in a context of higher demand than supply, AIIC was empowered to enforce its rules during the second half of the 20th century. Anti-trust laws curtailed its regulatory power, but AIIC’s rules remain largely unchanged on the ground. Its “recommendations” keep shaping the ways in which interpreting is organized, at least among the biggest public employers, and interpreters targeting the market covered by AIIC are likely to find that it is in their best interest to respect such guidelines.

As for the RID, its engagement with professionalization was more focused on the establishment of standards for qualified interpreting practice, with little concern, from the outset, for issues of economic compensation; a front on which it has been a rather passive player. Within the RID system of regulation, quality standards provide a benchmark for a certification exam (access to the profession) and the curriculum design of educational programmes (access to knowledge).

The RID model is widespread beyond SLI in the US and tends to be more transparent for practitioners and prospective interpreters wishing to access education and the professional community, compared to the AIIC system, whose mechanisms of coercion are delegated to its members, acting as gatekeepers and guardians of adherence to the rules. Nevertheless, sponsorship-based membership access does not seem to be widespread among professional associations of interpreters, outside of AIIC.

The tensions described in the section “Current issues and debates” cut across the regulation of the market, professional practice, and training. They alert us to the need to extend our analysis to players who are not enshrined by any institution but whose practice and theorization may be decisive in the development of interpreting. Taking a broad view of key internal players in the field allows for inclusion within the scope of analysis not only the players that have traditionally occupied center stage in the development of the “interpreting establishment”, but also players that tend to be missing from the mainstream picture of the field, for reasons that may be geopolitical, socio-economic, or socio-professional.

Occupational groups function as complex systems composed of several institutional and individual players. It is the dynamic relationship among these players that shapes the ever-changing nature of this system (Swabey and Gajewski Mickelson 2008). To account for the relationships among key players and the ways in which they configure the interpreting profession, there is a need to combine a top-down approach with a bottom-up approach. The former consists of looking at formalized structures and institutions that are at the core of the interpreting community and the ways in which they inform practitioners’, educators’, and researchers’ ethos. The latter consists of studying informal groups as well as individual players who occupy a rather marginal position within the community, so as to contrast their respective practices and ethos.

This combined approach is a promising way to account for the overlapping and diverging perspectives on the interpreting profession among institutions and groups, across power positions, as well as between the collective and the individual. This analytical description
of the interpreting profession, its organization and mutations requires scholars to engage with the
dower play that is inherent to the development of any profession, and to provoke and orient
changes towards a more beneficial professionalization process for both practitioners and the
communities they ought to serve.

This is a particularly important research agenda for interpreting studies, since with the
increased connectedness among interpreting actors scattered across the globe, the interpreting
community is enlarging and its underlying power dynamics are being reconfigured in ways that
may shape the face of interpreting in the years to come.

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KEY EXTERNAL PLAYERS IN 
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE 
INTERPRETING PROFESSION

Sofía García-Beyaert

Introduction

Providing service to end-users who have cross-linguistic communication needs is the societal role of interpreting as a profession. The contexts in which interpreting services are needed are very diverse. The degree of development of interpreting as a profession is diverse too: significant differences in interpreters’ wages, professional authority, and accountability for the quality of the service delivered are present across sectors. There is an equally diverse array of contextual factors, which have an imprint on the way interpreting is performed and is expected to be performed.

This chapter looks at interpreting from an inside-out perspective. We will look into different kinds of actors who are not within interpreting circles: they are not interpreters nor interpreting scholars themselves. They are external to the profession, and yet they play a key role – whether actually deployed or (still) only potential – in the way the discipline and the profession evolve. Focusing on “key external players” is an opportunity to situate interpreting within a complex societal web of interests, powers, rights, and responsibilities.

This chapter has two objectives; one is descriptive, aiming at a characterization of the variety of external players, and the other is analytical, reflecting on the implication of external player configurations. This analysis will inform recommendations for professional and research practices that are aware of external players. The end of the chapter will briefly consider future directions in connection with the approach proposed here.

We will place a gravitational centre on the user of the interpreting service. This underlines the fact that the interpreting profession is a service that meets needs in society. Figure 3.1 represents different typologies of players around the service user that contribute to the delivery of interpreting services. Internal players have been covered in Chapter 2. External players, as categorized here, include *grantors*, *receivers* and *providers* of the service. *Grantors* is the category of players who have power to determine whether the interpreting service is provided or not. *Grantors* are typically either *decision-makers*, *resource holders* or both. They play a crucial role in whether the *receivers*, who are the end-users of the service, obtain what they need or not. *Providers* include *agencies*, which often play the role of intermediaries between interpreters and end-users. They are in such close contact with the profession that they could potentially be
considered internal players but, as we will see, they do not always become proactively involved with shaping the profession (hence their hybrid character as represented in the chart).

*Grantors, receivers, and providers* are complementary concepts. They reflect the logic of service provision, in which demand (*receivers*) and supply (*providers*) are ultimately governed by tangible resources (managed by *grantors*). A clear-cut taxonomy of players, however, is not reflective of their complex relations and identities, which actually have a crucial impact on the development of the profession. But the categories proposed here will be useful referents throughout the chapter. Having separate categories is helpful for the analysis, as it allows us to contrast different types of players and to formulate enquiries about their different conceptions of interpreting, about how they perceive each other, about what their vested interests might be, and whether such interests are ever likely to enter into conflict with one another.

Three cases of interpreting development will be illustrated here to show three different configurations in the map of external players. Consideration will begin with conference interpreting users when interpreting was an incipient professional activity, after World War II (WWII). The second case of analysis is sign language interpreting, a profession whose development has clearly been influenced by legislation (since the 1970s in the US). The final examination is devoted to the de-professionalizing trends observed since 2007 in the court interpreting sector in countries like the UK, Ireland, or Spain.

The three cases are presented in chronological order. The order is sequential in two other ways (which are not necessarily correlated): the map of players is increasingly complex, and the social recognition of the profession is decreasingly present. The cases have indeed been chosen for their multi-layered diversity.

They should be considered as a sample. This chapter cannot pretend to be a comprehensive analysis of the numerous external players that help shape the profession in a large variety of sectors, nor does it pretend to provide an exhaustive description of every relevant trait of the selected cases. The goal is rather to look at variation among external players configurations as they affect the way in which the profession develops, and to offer concrete tools for their analysis.

Two sorts of content are interwoven throughout the chapter. One is descriptive information, aiming at the characterization of players and their circumstances. The other is analytical, reflecting on the implications of external player configurations. This analysis will inform recommendations for professional and research practices that are aware of external players. The end of the chapter will briefly consider future directions in connection with the approach proposed here.

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*Figure 3.1* Typology of players in the development of the interpreting profession.
**Case Studies**

**Case 1: International organizations and the birth of the interpreting profession**

When it comes to the professionalization of interpreting, the “Association Internationale d’Interprètes de Conférences” (AIIC) is irrefutably a trailblazer. Even though the professionalizing trend preceded the founding of AIIC, it was not until the association came together that the momentum gathered to give conference interpreting the final push towards professionalization. Several references to the association itself and to its role across the history of interpreting have been made in other chapters of this volume (see, for example, Chapters 1, 2, 20, and 25). Here we will focus on the context of its development, and particularly, on the following question: with whom did AIIC negotiate to develop its nascent corporate interests?

When the association was created in the 1950s, favourable circumstances converged to transform interpreting from an occasional occupation to a real profession. New possibilities had arisen on the technical side. With the technological developments for simultaneous interpreting (see Chapter 1), an innovative supply was to meet a newly arisen demand. Indeed, unprecedented and sustained forms of international exchange appeared with the creation of several post-war international organizations.

A critical mass of professional interpreters started to gather around the UN (founded in 1946), the Council of Europe (1949), and their subsidiary organizations, both as staff members and as freelancers (Keiser 1999). AIIC was founded in 1952 and soon established negotiating commissions that sought to finalize collective bargaining agreements with these international organizations for the benefit of both staff and freelance interpreters. The UN, the Council of Europe, and other similar bodies decided in 1969 to start signing agreements with AIIC for five-year periods of time. They would grant interpreters stable remuneration and appropriate working conditions as well as health coverage and other insurance plans, and in some cases the agreements included access to pension plans (Keiser 1999, p. 87). Conference interpreters were, for the first time, identifying themselves as a corporate body and as such, were laying down the standards for trade around their professional activity. New international organizations could rely on this new professional body to develop their work.

The alignment with the growing “internationalism” trend is the first characteristic of AIIC’s initial interlocutors which we will briefly devote some attention to. Although the concept of international organizations was not novel to the post World War II period (Reinalda 2009; Henig 2010), the period of 1945–50 was characterized by an evolved approach to international relations. The organizations under the umbrella of the UN, those related to the European convergence processes, and most often too, international NGOs were, according to Iriye (2002), motivated by the trend of “internationalism”.

“Internationalism” denotes the prevailing sense of a global community that gained singular maturity after WWII. It is the realization that the world is increasingly interconnected and that international relations should transcend the search for peace; peoples’ wellbeing is considered a matter for international concern (Iriye 2002, p. 42). Despite its unprecedented carnage, WWII brought together regions of the world that had until then remained apart. During the Cold War that immediately followed WWII, international organizations were eager to find solutions to avoid thinking of international affairs in an irrevocably bipolar fashion; and the emergence of atomic weapons represented a new global threat that required international supervision to avoid a nuclear war (Iriye 2002).

Whatever the relative weight of unilateral interests, the conception of an interdependent world after 1945 provided for a more favourable climate of collaboration than ever before. The
Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the European Convention of Human Rights (1953) were born in that climate. The first sprouts for the creation of the European Union emerged in the 1950s, and from 1960s on, progressive institutional integration gave birth to the first democratic supranational government.

The second characteristic of AIIC’s interlocutors is readiness for international dialogue, which was a direct consequence of increasing internationalism from the League of Nations through the years when AIIC was first being established. That international collaboration for the common good involves intellectual exchange is self-evident. This fact is also reflected in the functioning of both the Council of Europe and the UN. The structure of the Council of Europe provided a deliberative organ, the Parliamentary Assembly, with representatives from each signatory state, which in turn serves the purpose of informing the decisions of its other organ, the Committee of Ministers. The UN too has an Assembly, which served as a forum for representatives of all member states. While the Security Council is the most powerful of the six UN components because it is the only one that has genuine powers to implement actions, the Assembly is the administrative and political centre of the UN, and all UN organs are attached to it in one way or another (Reuter 1958, pp. 271–4).

The evolution of the seating arrangements for international encounters is another subtle yet explicit sign of an evolving commitment to international dialogue. (See García-Beyaert 2014, for an online photographic illustration of the evolution we describe here.) At the League of Nations in the early 1920s, seats are arranged in straight lines. Difficulties in seeing and hearing each other had been pointed out during sessions of the International Labour Organization (ILO, an agency of the League of Nations) where alternative seating arrangements were tested (Baigorri-Jalón 2005, p. 993). In 1951, the UN General Assembly permanent headquarters were constructed. The design followed a more convenient and dialogue-inviting shape with seating arranged in a semi-circular and gradient set-up. Pictures of the Council of Europe’s Assembly in the late 1960s show a room where the semi-circle is closer to a full circle, where visibility of and by every participant is granted.

International dialogue comes hand in hand with cross-linguistic communication. Multilingualism in dialogue-oriented organizations is the third characteristic we will focus on. In international settings, cross-linguistic communication typically happened from and/or into French or English. Increased internationalism, increased interest in inclusive exchange, and a commitment to international democracy certainly help to explain the progressive transition towards truly multilingual conferences. It is no coincidence that Winston Churchill addressed the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe at its first session in August 1949 in French: “beware, I am going to speak in French”, he started (Council of Europe, 1997, p. 10). An inclusive linguistic attitude carried strong symbolism.

The practical aspects of multilingual conferences had begun to be explored in the times of the League of Nations, introducing, among other things, the simultaneous mode for more participatory and inclusive meetings. The ILO, mentioned above, was born under the League of Nations and continued working under the UN. At the first ILO Conference in Washington DC in 1919, government, workers and employers were gathered for the first time “on an equal footing” (Reinalda 2009, p. 227) to adopt the first international labour conventions and recommendations. To respond to the ever-growing complexity of the communicative needs of this endeavour, the ILO hosted the first simultaneous interpreting experiment in 1929 with “relatively primitive” technical conditions (Baigorri-Jalón 2007, p. 32) that enabled for the first time the simultaneity of interpreting rendered into seven different languages. These were important steps in the democratization of international dialogue, allowing the participation of workers who, in Baigorri-Jalón’s words, would otherwise have been “condemned to silence in
international affairs due to their lack of linguistic competence in the vehicular language” (Baigorri-Jalón 2005, p. 995). These steps paved the way for future international organizations.

The simultaneous interpreting system was adopted at the UN as well as the Council of Europe (Roland 1999, p. 131). The Council of Europe had only two official languages, English and French, but the plenary sessions of the Assembly also included German, Italian, Russian, Greek, and Spanish as working languages. As for the UN, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish were all established as the official languages in 1946 (Arabic is today a sixth official language). Multilingualism is at the core of international organizations, and interpreting is central to their functioning.

One may wonder about the operational and economic sustainability of multilingualism in a post-war context. The budget of the League of Nations had been 8 million dollars (United Nations 1947, p. 96). In June 1947, the estimated budget for 1948 just for the Conference and General Services section of the United Nations (which included the translation and interpreting services), was nearly 9 million dollars (Maxwell Graduate School of Citizenship and Public Affairs 1947, p. 56). Despite post-war penury, international organizations were well funded. Their budgets, it was recognized, amounted to only a very small fraction of wartime expenditures, and were thus good investments if they were to enable peace through international cooperation (United Nations 1947, p. 96).

In the case of the UN, it was the General Assembly’s responsibility to decide on the budget. The General Assembly – the deliberative organ – was also probably the most in need of effective cross-linguistic communication. So, once they were formed, AIIC negotiating committees addressed resourceful service users who had international communication at the core of their identity. These service users were end-users (receivers) as well as decision-makers and holders of the purse strings (resource holders). The management of the interpreting service was in-house or directly contracted with AIIC freelancers. International Organizations were also, then, their own providers. Every category of the players chart in Figure 3.1 was condensed, in this rather singular case, into one single entity as AIIC’s interlocutor. Such a simplified map of players also meant a high degree of homogeneity. Best practices could easily spread as professional culture from one organization to the other. Lastly, there was no player with a vested interest in an alternative development of the profession. AIIC professionals seized the opportunity to act as a coordinated group and negotiate the terms that would ensure lasting quality in the service. This is not to say that negotiations were always easy (see Keiser 1999), but the conditions in which the profession was born were rather comfortable.

**Case 2: Deaf identity and the development of sign language interpreting as a profession**

The case of sign language interpreting presents more complexity than the development of interpreting for international organizations. As Barry (1994, p. 787) points out, the wide variations in the level of socioeconomic development among countries result in variation in the programmes they offer to deaf people as well. Accounts from Bangladesh, French-speaking Africa, Peru, Brazil, or Ecuador in the 1990s draw a picture of the majority of deaf people as uneducated, unemployed, and isolated from the rest of society (Erting et al. 1994, p. 775). But the rights of deaf people are today internationally recognized: the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – a legally binding document – had 158 signatory countries as of October 2013 (United Nations Enable 2013). Compliance with the Convention involves the development of inclusion policies to provide interpreting services for deaf people.

As a result, sign language interpreting is now a relatively mature profession in the Western world. Scholars and practitioners are right to point out the existing challenges and to encourage
further development (see for example Witter-Merithew and Johnson 2004; and see Chapters 7 and 8 for complementary information on this branch of the profession). However, sign language interpreters are now part of the social imaginary and are clearly associated with the role of facilitating communication. Even if the intricacies of the task may not yet be accurately comprehended, the average person acknowledges the importance of sign language interpreting and is likely willing to devote public money to such services. In 1988, the European Parliament stressed the importance of recognizing sign language interpreting as a profession and ten years later, it called on the European Commission to work towards ensuring EU funding for (among other things) training of sign language tutors and interpreters (Timmermans 2005, p. 13). In June 2013, the European Commission started a pilot project that incorporates technology and sign language interpretation in facilitating communication between officials at the European institutions and sign language users.

Sign language interpreting has developed into a professional service in welfare societies as a response to undeniable and growing necessities and has been backed with the evolving support of a variety of external players. If interpreting is the response endorsed by different (external) players, what was the successful formulation of the demand? This is the backbone question that will guide the analysis for this case.

The evolution of sign language interpreting in the US is well documented and is likely relevant for other countries (Cokely 2005, p. 3). Let us focus on that country (for which chapters 2 and 7 offer important background information) to analyse the role of problem formulation and conceptions of entitlement by different external players.

Several pieces of legislation and policy measures contributed to the expansion of sign language interpreting as a professional collectivity in the US. The framework for those policies was around meeting the needs and guaranteeing the civil rights of people with disabilities through diverse measures of accommodation (The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, The All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, the American with Disabilities Act of 1990).

Contrary to what one might think, widespread frustration within the deaf community arose with the institutionalization of sign language interpreting as a profession. Witter-Merithew and Johnson offer a summary of concerns that represent “a departure from the original and primary purpose for which the Deaf community organized interpreters” (2004, p. 21). Cokely documents and analyses such a fissure, pointing out a shift in positionality from “Interpretation/transliteration as my contribution” where interpreters were closely connected to the Deaf community, to “interpretation/transliteration as a legislative fiat” where interpretation is “an activity in which legislatively mandated employment for practitioners required little or no involvement from the Community” (2005, p. 25). Despite the fact that regional interpreter education centres have received federal funding for more than 25 years, the connection to the community has been lost when it comes to training interpreters (Swabey and Gajewski 2008, p. 54).

According to Kent (2013), the institutionalized model of sign language interpreters’ education was drawn from previously professionalized fields of simultaneous interpreting (conference interpreting). This explains an overemphasis on speed as a quality criterion for the interpreting performance. It is actually potentially detrimental to communication when it comes to interaction with Deaf people. While sign language interpreting typically takes place simultaneously, turn-taking dynamics are often involved (sign language interpreting is most often dialogic, with the exception of conferences or broadcasted events, for example) and time is a key dimension to the search for mutual understanding. Kent hypothesizes that “continuing Deaf dissatisfaction with most interpreters is microsocial evidence of [macrosocial] intergroup conflict” (2013, p. 11).

Macrosocial tensions are present indeed. The very concept of disability, which is central to the legislation and policy measures that have served as a driving force for the development of the profession, is considered problematic by many in the Deaf community. Harlan L. Lane
(1992; 2002) and Branson & Miller (2002) convincingly frame disability as a hegemonic social construction that oppresses the Deaf community. These authors show that a narrow social construction by society at large of what it means to be deaf results in loss of choices for members of the Deaf community. Social constructions of deafness as a disability turn out to be more constrictive than the sensory limitation itself; hence the claim that the Hearing world oppresses the Deaf community and hence the concept of “audism”: “like racism and sexism, audism insists that inherent biological factors determine individual traits and capacity” (Lane, 2002, p. 282).

There are, then, at least two social constructions of deafness: one as difference, another as pathology (Horejes 2012, p. 73). Paddy Ladd coined the term “Deafhood” to offer a positive, culturally focused alternative to the medically oriented word “deafness” (Ladd 2003; Ladd and Lane 2013). Two different understandings of the essence of the problem lead to frictions regarding the way legal provisions are formulated and regarding the way they are applied; interpreting is a case in point. Friction allows us to identify different groups of active external actors: the deaf community on the one hand and society at large on the other hand.

Where would these two groups fall in the chart of players in Figure 3.1? We would find it hard to create unequivocal matches. From a traditional mainstream perspective, members of the deaf community should certainly be assigned the central position of receivers. They are users of interpreting services. Society at large (in the US and other countries), through the democratic mechanisms already in place, has set up legislative instruments as well as pathways for policy implementation that give deaf persons access to interpreters for identified basic needs. Institutions and citizens who take part in the political mechanisms of welfare societies fall, therefore, in what seems to be an obvious position of grantors. Grantors entitle receivers to a special service (interpreting) on the basis that the receivers’ disability sets them on an unequal footing that leads to unjust treatment if no accommodations are arranged.

Consider the alternative construction of deafness as difference rather than as disability; or, using Ladd’s (2003) term, consider Deafhood. What would happen to this player classification exercise? Scales start to tilt based on the premise that the Deaf community is, within our societies, just another cultural group which should enjoy equal access to welfare and other services. Interpreters are, then, the link between two communities that coexist within a common societal framework, and hence interlocutors on both sides of such link are both users of the interpreting service. Both deaf and non-deaf interlocutors are receivers. As in the UN or the Council of Europe, interpreting services are set up for the benefit of all participants. With this more egalitarian construction of the Deaf individual, it becomes more natural to envision members of the Deaf community as active participants in the democratic apparatus, as constituent members of the grantors group.

What these competing rationales illustrate is that the way external players construct and formulate a problem that requires societal attention affects the outcome. Depending on what the circumstances which require interpreting are constructed to be (disability versus communication amongst cultural groups), the shape that interpreting takes as a profession can vary significantly. Problem formulation by the different players we have identified here is in turn determined by a variety of macrosocial factors such as ideological conceptions on the best functioning model for societies, social constructions of entitlement and the groups that are entitled, power dynamics among minority and majority groups, etc.

Before we move on to our last case study, it is worth noting that the centrality of the deaf community as an external player in the development of sign language interpreting has a double dimension: both its active and its passive roles are important. On the one hand, the deaf community has developed over the last decades a true sense of empowerment despite – or against – historic oppression and has managed to formulate impactful claims (active role). On the other hand, even from a non-emancipated stance, the fact that there is a group that is identifiable/identified
by the rest of society has been key, as we have seen, to paving the way to entitlement and subsequent legislation and implementation programmes (passive role). “Disability” may not be a tag that the deaf community happily endorses, but it offers the framework within which society has been ready to accept that interpreting services are a necessary social tool.

Interestingly, the press release for the EU pilot project we mentioned earlier in this section is articulated around communication needs, language difference and participation. “Impairment” is only mentioned once and secondarily so (European Commission 2013). The programme itself – targeting inclusive political participation – and the way it is publicized may well be symptoms of a progressive shift in the problem formulation in society at large, drifting away from the centrality of disability.

Case 3: Outsourced management and the de-professionalization of court interpreting

Among the non-conference interpreting sectors, court interpreting typically enjoys a privileged position (see Chapter 12 on court interpreting). The right to an interpreter in criminal proceedings is generally granted and supported by (sometimes ancient) legislative precepts in different countries. Yet the maturity of court interpreting as a professional activity is in many jurisdictions clearly below ideal standards. There is far too often a gap between, on the one hand, the widespread and historic recognition that language assistance (in criminal proceedings) is necessary for procedural fairness in the presence of language barriers, ensuring effective communication involves sophisticated measures (infrastructure) and skills (interpreters’ expert abilities). The latter requires conscious policy-making. In the last few years, oblivious policy-makers have led countries like the United Kingdom, Spain, or Ireland into processes of “de-professionalization” (Slaney 2012) of court interpreting in the face of ever increasing numbers of multilingual trials in such countries. Professional interpreters are being pushed out of the system and non-professional “linguists” (as some have inaccurately called them) are being hired instead. Why are experienced professional interpreters not the ones facilitating crucial communication in court? Policy-makers are not the only forces at play: a variety of players bear a responsibility for such a dangerous set-up. Exploring answers to this question will lead us to consider every one of the categories that are represented in our chart, including our hybrid internal/external category of providers.

In the language industry, agencies are natural intermediaries between freelance interpreters and consumers of interpreting services, but they have typically been little studied (Ozolins 2007, p. 121). The agency responsible for the provision of court interpreting services in the UK, however, has gathered considerable media attention in that country, as well as interest among interpreting practitioners and researchers worldwide. In a context of progressive privatization of public services in search of the kind of efficiency that characterizes the private sector – a trend that started under the Thatcher Government – the Ministry of Justice outsourced the management of interpreting services. Interpreters would not be contracted by contacting freelancers directly: an agency would be in charge of a central management. Throughout 2011 and 2012, the provision of interpreting services for justice courts and tribunals was progressively assigned nationwide to Applied Language Services, soon to be absorbed by Capita, a for-profit company. Since 1994, England has had a National Registry of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI), a not-for-profit bank of qualified interpreters that most criminal justice system agencies had voluntarily committed to using (Maniar 2013). Capita, far from committing to quality interpreting through the system in place, decreased interpreters’ rates – thus turning away many experienced and qualified interpreters – and also decreased minimum qualification requirements. Indeed, Jajo the rabbit and Masha the cat are interpreters’ pets who were successfully enrolled on Capita’s rosters.
By doing so, their owners denounced the meagre screening and background checks applied to the “interpreters” that Capita is ready to send to court (Crawford 2012; Lillington 2012).

A similar situation exists in Spain. Seprotec Multilingual solutions has been assigned an increasing number of public contracts in different jurisdictions to cover interpreting services for the police and court since 2007. This company’s name has been associated in the field with numerous scandals and complaints since the first contract was granted and up until the 2013 request for tenders (Diagonal 2011 highlights some of them). In August 2013, Seprotec was granted a new contract, worth almost 10,000,000 euros, to cover translation and interpreting services for the police at the national level (BOE 2013). At the time when this contract was let, Seprotec was subject to investigation by the antifraud agency of Catalonia for allegedly falsifying information regarding the qualifications of up to 90% of their pool of interpreters in order to win the tenders (Tribunal Superior de Justicia de Cataluña 2013).

Waterhouse (2013) studied the situation in Ireland in one of the few academic contributions on the topic of managing court interpreting services. With no pre-existing infrastructure to respond to the demand, a drastic increase in the number of multilingual cases (paralleling the novelty of multiculturalism in Irish society) led to chaos in court: individual interpreters and language companies started “scrambling and jostling with one another [at the court] to be assigned to each relevant case” (ibid., p. 182). A single contract for centralized management by an experienced company, the US firm Lionbridge, was sought as a solution by court authorities in 2007. As in the UK or in Spain, outsourced management by a private company has not proved ideal, but policy-makers have shown little sensitivity. Despite criticism of the lack of guarantees for quality in the original contract (which focused on language ability and devoted little attention to interpreting skills), the requirements for competence in interpreting completely disappeared from the 2012 new request for tenders (ibid., p. 188).

Marc Starr is an interpreter registered with the NRPSI in the UK, with over 10 years of experience, mainly in court. In an informal interview he made the following observations:

[I]f a policy was going to be made, the public … had to be seen as being on side, I guess. And one of the things I believe has not helped at all is shock horror stories in the press about “this is the [expenditure] on interpreters” … and it mentions five-figure, six-figure, seven-figure sums … and it’s always focused on the cost … and nothing to do with the benefit that was brought …

(Starr 2013)

In Starr’s analysis, such media coverage of the situation, paired with alarming news on foreign criminals, contributed to the depiction of interpreting as an “extravagance” and helped the average person draw the conclusion that public spending on interpreters is undeserved by the end-user (prototypically, the foreign defendant). In Ireland too, after studying the (occasional) media coverage of court interpreting issues, Waterhouse reports a tendency of newspapers to sensationalize the amounts “lost in translation” (2013, p. 190). Browsing the comment sections at the foot of articles in online newspapers featuring court interpreting generally provides, regardless of the country, a picture of hostility around aspects of language accommodation for newcomers. The argument that the burden of language acquisition and adaptation to the national language falls on the foreign individual is pervasively expressed in one way or another. “The ‘other’ should learn our language”, is the rationale. In the matter of court interpreting, the public is an important constituent of our grantor external player category. Public money funds public institutions, including the justice system and its interpreter services (the public as resource holder) and the popularity of policy measures is something policy-makers are sensitive to (the public influencing decision-makers).
Another important and more obvious component of the *grantors* category is of course the regulators and managers who administer public money for the common good. As mentioned above, legislation generally ensures the right to an interpreter in criminal proceedings. However, in the case of each of the example countries that we have used here, there are no specifications regarding the actual delivery of the interpreting service and the minimum requirements for the interpreter. In other words, there are certain guarantees for the presence of an interpreter but the quality of the interpreting service provided is not clearly factored in as an aspect that is determinant of procedural fairness of trials.

The 2010 EU Directive on the right to translation and interpretation in criminal proceedings aims precisely at facilitating the application of the right to “have the free assistance of an interpreter” enshrined in Article 6 of the European Convention of Human Rights. However, no definition is provided of what “quality” or “adequate” interpretation to safeguard the fairness of proceedings is. No specifications on what it takes to be an interpreter who is “appropriately qualified” are offered.

If regulation is loose or evasive in regards to actual quality, what are the incentives for *decision-makers* or for service *providers* to ensure that every measure is taken to provide actual professional interpretation, guaranteeing effective communication in every case?

In the market logic of privatized public services, the absence of specific measures paired with little knowledge, sensitivity or interest by public contract issuers regarding the intricacies of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic communication, takes us to a situation where effective communication is de-emphasized. In all three countries of focus here – England, Spain, and Ireland – the first consequence of outsourcing the management of interpreting services was a drastic decrease in the fees of interpreters. And yet, with hourly fees up to four times lower than what these companies receive from the state, the cost of interpretation to the state is unlikely reduced by externalizing management (Slaney 2012; Waterhouse 2013, p. 191; APTIJ 2014). Contracted agencies, in an unrestricted framework, have been able to maximize their profits (which is their ultimate goal and their very raison d’être) by decreasing their own costs as much as possible, hiring whoever is willing to work for the rates offered (which generally does not include committed interpreters with training and experience).

With very minimal requirements, and in a context of abundant economic migrants looking for opportunities in their new country, finding somewhat multilingual individuals willing to take on the job at the rate that is available has not been a challenge – not enough of a challenge to disrupt this operating model, in any case. As an added factor, a market logic in the absence of strict regulation has had the effect of diminishing any chances there might be for quality interpreting. Bacik is right to indicate that “privatization of services has the potential to create unacceptable conflicts of interest that may actually threaten the right to a fair trial” (Bacik 2007, p. 222 cited in Waterhouse 2013). A contributor named Tarik Aziz offered a good example of a conflict of interest, as he commented on Waterhouse’s 2010 contribution to the blog Human Rights in Ireland. Aziz said: “another interesting thing about Lionbridge’s brilliant strategy is that by the time the interpreter [sic] become used to the juridical vocabulary they get rid of them, hiring new people. If a client is satisfied with the services provided by a certain interpreter and request their presence again, Lionbridge will do the contrary, fearing that the interpreter might try to work with their client directly” (comment published in Waterhouse 2010).

This is far from an ideal situation of agencies establishing a collaborative relationship with interpreters, in which both categories of *providers* are allies in the provision of professional services. Ozolins (2007) reminds us that different agencies have different takes on what their relation to professional issues should be. Agencies are not uniformly committed to providing feedback, to offering training to interpreters, or to ensuring minimum standards of practice (*ibid.*, p. 127). In the case of court interpreting in England, Ireland, and Spain, the focus of the agency is on its
contractual relationship with the purchaser rather than its professional partnership with interpreters (ibid., p. 129). In other words, the agency is much more of an external player and is not developing its potential as a contributor to professional standards (internal player).

Linda Okahara, from the non-profit Asian Health Services in California, wishes structural factors encouraged agencies to compete on the basis of the level of commitment to professionalism and not only on issues of price (cited in Ozolins 2007, p. 127). But competition is based on what the buyers value. Her commentary is a good reminder of the dialectic dynamics in the construction of players’ roles and their influence on the development of the profession. As we have seen here, agencies have a key impact on the way the service is provided and on the way the profession evolves; but it is also the case that macro contextual elements (Okahara’s structural factors) have a determining impact on whether agencies take on the opportunity to be crucial internal players in offering quality services, and therefore in the development of the profession, or whether they choose to remain unengaged in aspects of professionalism. Macro contextual elements are shaped by players, and players’ roles are shaped by macro contextual elements. Legislation, contractors’ perceptions of what is desirable, and the presence of competitors that do strive to offer quality services are among the contextual elements that can have an impact on the way actual interpreting services are provided.

Another important factor in the macro context is the role of the receiver of the service, the only external player on our list we have not considered yet for this case. As opposed to the case of sign language interpreting and its development, an active actor on the non–hegemonic receivers’ end (the “hegemonic” receivers are members of the judiciary system in this case) seems to be lacking. In all the backlash against the privatization of interpreting services, the voice of those directly affected by it is not heard. But who are the people affected by this poor policy-making, whose basic rights are undermined? The only way to categorize them as a group is by making reference to what they do not share with the mainstream. They do not speak the societal language(s). Mainstream members of society can identify them as “the others”, but this does not give them a group identity. Individuals affected by the poor quality of interpretation during trials do not relate to each other in any other way: their cultural backgrounds are as diverse as can be. I would argue that it is more difficult for them to identify a common source of structural oppression worth resisting than it has been the case for deaf people who have a point of reference regarding the kind of interpreting services they expect. Those affected by poor court interpreting policy measures do not have common shared experiences as a community, which is a key element in generating reference points on the one hand, and a sense of empowerment on the other.

Yet an empowered and/or active group of receivers would most likely tip the scales in the configuration of players: it would change the set-up of structural factors Okahara referred to. A couple of examples where power distribution is different are illustrative:

Stern (2012) compares two different contexts of interpreting. She compares working conditions of interpreters in domestic and international courts and shows that there is a stark contrast between the two. In courts of national jurisdiction “there is a strong sense that a court is a monolingual and monolithic judicial body that is not really ideally suited for interpreted communication”, she says during an interview (Stern 2013); whereas in the model of international courts, “there is a whole concept that the court assures the level of quality of interpretation, including opportunities for an early identification of errors”. It would not be too far-fetched to consider that the high profile of international trials could explain the difference in the efforts to attain quality. Also, the inherently international character of these courts offers a context where there is no mainstream culture. It is similar to the case of other international organizations (covered in case 1), where there might be a need to restrict the number of operational languages or to prioritize a few languages over others for pragmatic reasons, but all interlocutors stand in principle (and in practice, to the extent possible) on an equal footing, and all necessary efforts are made to ensure the effectiveness of communication.
Another instance of stark contrast between daily trials and a high profile trial is observed in the trial of those accused of the Madrid bombing attacks, in Spain. On March 11, 2004, 191 people died and over 1,500 were wounded when four trains were bombed in terrorist attacks that were attributed mainly to Islamic extremists. Three years later, 400 journalists from all over the world gathered to cover a trial that involved three judges and over 50 lawyers, and lasted about five months (Martin and Ortega Herráez 2013, p. 101). The dimensions of the trial itself, but also very likely public attention and international visibility, motivated the judiciary authorities to take extra measures to ensure effective communication with witnesses and defendants who were speakers of different Arabic variants. Simultaneous interpreting (and some of the necessary technical equipment) was introduced for the occasion as an unprecedented set-up in the history of Spanish courts (ibid., p. 104). In their concluding commentary of a chapter analysing the collaboration between interpreters and legal professionals during the trials, Martin and Ortega Herráez conclude: “Certainly the authorities have shown that they are aware of the importance of recruiting fully qualified interpreters, and one may wonder why all trials do not merit a similar level of services” (ibid., p. 113).

Visibility, but also voice of those affected, and a successful framing of interpreting as a matter of public interest are certainly concepts worth considering in the search for answers.

**Recommendations for practice**

When incorporating awareness of external player configurations in the practice and research of interpreting, posing reflective questions can be edifying. For any individual case of interpreting practice one might be involved in or researching, one initial, simple question is stirring: how many external players can be identified?

The three cases we have studied here show how diverse external player configurations can be. From one context of interpreting to the next, not only the number of players, but also their relative positioning in an imaginary map of players can vary greatly. Resorting to a typology of players (Figure 3.1) has proved helpful for the brief examination of each individual case we have presented here. Having a typology as a backdrop has also proved useful for the overall comparative analysis across cases.

By contrasting the different cases against each other, a complementary tool for the analysis of external players can be offered. Figure 3.2 is a diagram based on some of the factors for which variation is observed in the three cases we just covered. Such factors represent different layers of the imaginary map of players. They can be classified into two general categories: factors that have an influence on the distribution of “power” among players; and factors related to players’ perceptions and conceptualizations, which I have called “ideational”. Each of these factors will vary over a spectrum of possibilities for each interpreting context. Opposite ends of such spectrums are provided for each factor.

With Figure 3.2 in mind, let’s go back to the question “how many external players can be identified?” The more players involved, the more likely the configuration will be complex. Chances of disparity are simply higher. And, with a complex map of players, the development of the profession will naturally be less straightforward.

In the presence of multiple players, it is particularly likely that the distribution in the typologies of players (factor 1) will be broadly distributed: we will be able to assign at least one different player to each of the categories of the chart in Figure 3.1. The case of court interpreting in the UK, Spain, and Ireland was one of broad distribution, unlike the case of interpreting for international organizations in the 1950s and 60s. Uneven leverage (factor 2) is the general tendency. Configurations where every player has the same level of power are rare.
In circumstances of broad distribution of the typologies of players, with likely uneven leverage, ideational factors gain relevance. Firstly, the more diverse the roles and influences of the players, the more likely their perceived interests will differ from each other’s (factor 3). A key question, then, is whether any player may have interests that enter into conflict with the core values or the internal good (MacIntyre 2007) of the profession (factor 4). On the other hand, even in the absence of conflicting interests, undetected clashes among different players in the conception of what the internal good of interpreting is could become an invisible source of tension that can hamper a healthy evolution of the profession. The case of sign language interpreting is a good example of different players understanding interpreters’ roles differently. Another important question to ask oneself, then, is whether all players perceive the need for interpretation in the same way (factor 5). If not, what can be done to unify players’ representations of the need for interpreting services?

This last question connects to what in the interpreting discipline is a well-known and often-referred-to problem: third parties’ lack of awareness of the profession and the need to “educate clients”. Distinguishing different kinds of players, their different ideational resources and their relative power can be considered a shifting tool. It facilitates a transition from a “raising awareness approach” – letting others know what interpreting really is about – to an approach that is focused on generating commitment – convincing others to align with the cause. A more sophisticated understanding of what narratives can resonate best with each of the external players’ standpoints can indeed help internal players adopt a proactive and contextually engaged approach, which becomes particularly vital in contexts of diverging interests. The goal is not so much to aim for a simple configuration map; it is rather to acknowledge and understand the different layers of complexity that most contexts entail to be able to take action accordingly.

**Future directions**

A thorough study of more cases would very likely allow the isolation of more factors than the ones identified above. The study of external players is a whole research avenue in and of itself that has scarcely been explored. As a service profession, interpreting would not make sense without

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**Figure 3.2 Diagram of configuration of players’ maps.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACTORS</th>
<th>SPECTRUM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Typologies of players distribution</td>
<td>Concentrated in a few individuals or entities - Broly distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Players’ leverage distribution</td>
<td>Even - Uneven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Players’ vested interests</td>
<td>Convergent - Divergent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Players’ commitment to the internal good of the profession</td>
<td>Committed - Uncommitted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Players’ representations of the need</td>
<td>Similar - Disparate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**MAP CONFIGURATION**

SIMPLE - COMPLEX
third parties (those who are served). Consequently, interpreting studies has included service users in the analysis to a certain extent. Dean and Pollard (2005), for example, remind us that interpreting, as a practice profession, involves the participation of the consumer. But the object of enquiry typically remains centred on the professional activity and the communicative situation the interpreter is part of.

The characteristics of the communicative situation constitute a micro level of analysis, which is complexly interconnected to a macro level of analysis that is worth our attention. Just as when we see a map of the world that is produced at the opposite end of the globe, for which the centre is not where we are used to seeing it, we should be reminded here that what is internal and what is external is relative to where we decide to place the emphasis or the gravitational centre. Interpreting studies have traditionally emphasized issues relevant to professionalism and a variety of aspects of the communicative situation. The focus is on the practice of interpreting. It responds to increased specialization and the emergence of interpreting studies as a discipline. However, there is value in minding the relevance of context and relating our centres to other centres of interest. Looking outside of our circles can be enriching.

Pöchhacker noted that “interpreting scholars to date have expended relatively little effort on models of interpreting in history, society or specific institutions” (2004, p. 88). But other disciplines that concern themselves with structures and the members that form structures, like policy analysis, organizational studies, or systems science, have also typically disregarded interpreting as a potential field for new insights. The necessary cross-pollination between fields is yet to come in this regard. Questions concerning the variety of players involved help us gain a deeper understanding of the development of the profession so far; but most importantly, they are key to the future development of interpreting.

Further reading


Witter-Merithew, A. and Johnson, L., 2004. Market disorder within the field of sign language interpreting: Professionalization implications. Journal of Interpretation, pp.19–56. This article uses Traits Theory to analyse the level of professionalization of sign language interpreting. By so doing, the interconnectedness between regulations and actions of internal and external players is (indirectly) addressed.
References


Introduction

For professionals or students of language curious about what we know about interpreting, it is useful to be aware of how research on this phenomenon has evolved. For one thing, interpreting studies as a field of scientific endeavour is relatively young, so that some of its early works continue to shape the field today. At the same time, research on interpreting has been undertaken from various scholarly vantage points, using concepts and methods from a variety of different disciplines, or paradigms. Understanding the research output and state of the art therefore requires some acquaintance with the field’s diverse developmental perspectives over the past half century. The present chapter will review the various stages and strands in the evolution of research on interpreting, giving special attention to early developments as well as the theoretical, methodological and thematic orientations underlying the state of the art in the first decades of the twenty-first century.

A new profession and skill

While historical evidence of interpreting as an activity in such contexts as trade, diplomacy and warfare dates back several thousand years, research on interpreters and interpreting began only a hundred years ago. With the exception of a few studies by historians of Antiquity (e.g. Hermann [1956] 2002), scholarly interest throughout most of the twentieth century was directed toward contemporary interpreting practices, such as those emerging in high-level international settings after World Wars I and II. More specifically, interpreters became an object of scientific study when interpreting began to be practised and appreciated as a professional function in multilingual meetings of diplomats and heads of state. The negotiations for the Treaty of Versailles after World War I literally prepared the ground for the institutionalisation of this professional function, which came to be exercised by staff and freelance interpreters at the Geneva-based League of Nations and International Labour Organization in the 1920s (see Chapter 1 on the history of interpreting and Chapter 11 on conference interpreting). It was in this context that the first piece of systematic empirical research on the emerging profession of conference interpreting was carried out.
Evolution of interpreting research

Breaking ground

Jesús Sanz Poch, a Spanish educator on a scholarship in Geneva in the late 1920s, took an interest in the work of interpreters in the international organisations there. Based on his fascination with the psychological foundations of education that were being laid at the time, Sanz (1930) conducted an interview-based survey among some twenty practitioners, referred to as *interprètes parlementaires*. The study, which he presented at the Sixth Congress of Applied Psychology in Barcelona in 1930, centred on the abilities or aptitudes required for the task. In his findings he listed a number of physical requirements, mental qualities, such as intelligence, concentration, intuition and memory, and affective and moral traits, including poise, dignity and discretion. In light of subsequent developments, it is noteworthy, but not surprising, that Sanz – and his respondents – mentioned behavioural as well as cognitive qualities. After all, interpreters at the time were still performing “on stage” and were highly visible among the speakers and other participants in what Sanz called “ordinary” (i.e. consecutive) interpreting, as opposed to the novel “telephonic” variant. Sanz nevertheless devoted a separate section of his report to the new, simultaneous mode, pointing to its special requirements in terms of divided attention and processing speed – the very topics that would take centre-stage in subsequent research (see Chapter 5 on simultaneous interpreting).

Simultaneous processing

Following its widely noted use at the Nuremberg Trial and its subsequent adoption by the United Nations, simultaneous interpreting (SI) piqued the curiosity of several psychologists, some of whom held the assumption that it was not possible to carry out two demanding mental tasks at the same time. The simultaneity of listening and speaking thus became a point of interest in psychological research. In one of the earliest studies, Treisman (1965) compared lag times in simultaneous repetition (“shadowing”) and “simultaneous translation” and found longer response times for the latter. The time delay between source speech and interpretation was also of primary interest to Oléron and Nanpon ([1965] 2002), who began their study by analysing authentic data from the field in several language pairs but then asked three interpreters to produce renderings of paragraphs, sentences and even individual words under more controlled conditions to facilitate measurement. They found average time lag values of two to three seconds, but with considerable variability.

A more complex set of experimental data was generated by Barik (1969) in the very first doctoral thesis on simultaneous interpreting. Barik asked three pairs of subjects with different levels of training and English/French bilinguality to interpret four different types of source material (from impromptu to read) and took a number of temporal measures. One of these was the extent of simultaneity, or overlap, of the source speech and the interpreter’s output. Finding that interpreters were mostly engaged in speaking when there was a pause in the original, Barik took this to lend potential support to the claim that interpreters crammed as much of their output as they could into pauses in the original so as to avoid simultaneous speaking and listening. This claim, in particular, but other aspects of these studies as well were to prove highly controversial and gave rise to a rather tense relationship between psychological investigators and the community of practitioners.

While instances of this tension can still be identified today, there are several early examples of a more convergent or even collaborative relationship between researchers and practitioners. Most noteworthy and consequential, perhaps, was the scholarly work done by UN Russian interpreter Ghelly Chernov together with psychologist Irina Zimnyaya, as laid down in
Chernov’s Russian monograph in the late 1970s and published in English posthumously a quarter of a century later (Chernov 2004). Contacts between psychologists and practitioners with academic aspirations also took place elsewhere, but without leading to joint projects. An exceptional figure in this regard was the British psychologist David Gerver, who devoted his doctoral work at Oxford University to SI (Gerver 1971). Aside from drawing up the very first process model, Gerver carried out a number of experimental studies, often with experienced interpreters as subjects, which addressed key concerns of the profession, such as the impact of high input speed, poor sound quality and source-speech prosody on SI performance. What is more, he also co-organised the first international conference on interpreting, which brought together specialists from many different scientific disciplines and pioneering scholars (and practitioners) of conference interpreting and signed language interpreting (Gerver and Sinaiko 1978). That symposium, held in Venice in 1977, could have led to the forging of a new interdisciplinary community centred on the study of interpreting. This, however, did not happen. Rather, the community of professionals and trainers spearheaded by Danica Seleskovitch in Paris asserted itself and managed to establish a paradigm of its own that was to shape the field for one or two decades.

**New paradigm**

By the 1960s, the newly emerged profession that had sparked initial research interest had become increasingly well organised, not least thanks to the work of AIIC, the International Association of Conference Interpreters, founded in 1953. Danica Seleskovitch, who served as the organisation’s executive secretary in the early 1960s and played a key role as an interpreter trainer at ESIT, the École Supérieure d’Interprètes et de Traducteurs, in Paris, came to epitomise the close link between the profession and university-level training institutions such as ESIT, within which she also established interpreting (and translation) as a branch of scholarly study. Her forceful defence of a compact theoretical and methodological approach was highly consequential for the evolution of the field: first, Seleskovitch and her associates succeeded in forging a disciplinary framework in its own right, and then, after more than a decade of unquestioned dominance, it gave those with dissenting views and new ideas something to challenge and replace with a new paradigm.

**Paris School**

At the heart of Seleskovitch’s achievement is her realisation that interpreting was not a process of linguistic conversion or substitution (“transcoding”) but a process of knowledge-driven comprehension followed by the re-expression of what the interpreter had understood. What Seleskovitch described so vividly in her 1968 book on conference interpreting may seem like common sense today, but it was a radical departure from the widely-held assumptions of the 1960s, when great sums were invested in the implementation of substitution-based machine translation. Rather than words and their dictionary equivalents, Seleskovitch’s theory of interpreting was based on the “sense” that an interpreter would grasp in a given communicative context. Her account of the mental process of interpreting therefore relied on the notion of “deverbalisation”: the interpreter would aim to go beyond, and even to “forget” the speaker’s words and seek to retain the sense of what the speaker conveyed or wished to convey, also referred to as the vouloir dire. This Interpretive Theory (IT) of Translation, subsequently dubbed the théorie du sens, was best demonstrated with reference to consecutive interpreting, where limitations of memory would not permit the interpreter to remember and translate all the speaker’s words. Seleskovitch did just that in her doctoral thesis. Based on an experimental corpus of consecutive interpretations generated by a
dozen professionals, Seleskovitch ([1975] 2002) sought to show that even the interpreters’ notes taken during the listening phase were mostly indicators of sense as a mental representation rather than reflections of a word-for-word process.

The theory propounded by Seleskovitch and espoused by colleagues at ESIT such as Marianne Lederer, who applied it to simultaneous interpreting (Lederer 1981), had major implications for the training approach established at ESIT. In a nutshell, this gave priority to the process over language, and regarded the consecutive mode as the foundation and essence of the technique. The low regard for issues of language meant that trainees where required to be highly proficient in their working languages before starting the (two-year postgraduate) course. It also meant, and means, that differences between languages in a given combination were not seen as a major obstacle to the basic sense-based process of interpreting.

The enduring legacy of the Paris School is most evident in the field of interpreter training, largely owing to an IT-informed teaching manual written by Seleskovitch and Lederer (1989) with the support of the European institutions. Thanks to subsequent translations, the *Pédagogie raisonnée de l’interprétation* is one of the most widely disseminated and used books on (conference) interpreter training even today, a quarter century after it was written.

Like its training approach, the research championed by the Paris School showed great stability. It was done mainly within the doctoral studies programme instituted at the University of Paris in 1974, and the theses supervised by Seleskovitch in the course of the 1970s and 1980s did much to build a second generation of scholars adhering to the tenets of the IT. Built on a set of theoretical assumptions, values (regarding the profession) and a consensus regarding the questions to ask and the methods to use, the approach to research taken by Seleskovitch and her associates constituted the founding paradigm of interpreting studies.

Having created a disciplinary space for the study of interpreting, the Paris School community was not inclined to adopt concepts and methods developed in other fields. A number of research-minded interpreters, including Daniel Gile and Barbara Moser-Mercer, therefore pursued their interdisciplinary interests outside the established paradigm, and their efforts prepared the ground for a new phase in the evolution of the field. The institutional framework for that new beginning was provided by an international conference held in late 1986 at the University of Trieste, where research on bilingual language processing from the perspectives of neurophysiology and neuropsychology had been launched in collaboration with the Interpreters’ School. The emerging consensus on the need for an interdisciplinary outlook and increased cooperation led Jennifer Mackintosh to speak of the beginning of a “‘Trieste Era’ in interpretation studies” (Gran and Dodds: 1989: 268).

**Post-Trieste**

In words as well as deeds, the IT paradigm was challenged during and after the Trieste Symposium. Nevertheless, replacing it with something different required efforts on several fronts. One of these was interdisciplinarity, which proved highly demanding. After all, research-minded interpreters, with few exceptions, had little background or experience in empirical science and yet were expected to become conversant with such designs as finger-tapping experiments to study cerebral lateralisation for languages. Another major task was internationalisation. With Paris, Geneva and Brussels as major centres of the profession, training and practice, the IT paradigm could function with French as the field’s lingua franca. As new initiatives emerged in Scandinavia, Eastern Europe and Asia, this choice became less obvious, and English soon became the main language for communication among the widely dispersed members of an increasingly international community.
More than a common language, a common platform was needed for information exchange and networking. This, too, materialised as an offshoot of the Trieste Symposium. The Interpreters’ Newsletter, first published in 1988 as a medium for periodic communication among the participants after the conference, quickly turned into the field’s first dedicated journal. One feature of this roughly annual publication was a bibliographic update listing new publications and resources. Daniel Gile, the most active broker of bibliographic data on conference interpreting to this day, set up the biannual IRTIN Bulletin (now CIRIN Bulletin) for the same purpose, creating an information network with “nodes” in dozens of countries.

While Gile’s efforts were highly instrumental in building an international scientific community for the study of conference interpreting, it remained unclear how this field would be positioned in the concert of academic disciplines. In this regard, the 1992 Translation Studies Congress in Vienna, whose plenary speakers included Gile as well as Hans Vermeer and José Lambert (Snell-Hornby et al. 1994), suggested the fast-growing field of Translation Studies as a suitable home to the (sub)discipline of “interpreting studies”.

With regard to language, networking and institutional integration as well as leading figures and dominant models, interpreting studies post-Trieste were evidently quite different from what had gone before. Still, there were major shared concerns, such as an interest in the cognitive process of interpreting and the preference for empirical data with a high degree of ecological validity. The new community’s distinctive aspiration to high(er) scientific standards is clearly reflected in the launching of the first peer-reviewed journal of interpreting research. Founded in 1996 by Barbara Moser-Mercer, together with cognitive scientist Dominic Massaro, Interpreting featured an editorial board whose members all had a background in psychology. Still, the inaugural issue of the journal included papers from a healthy mix of domains and perspectives, including signed language interpreting and community interpreting.

Such signs of diversification had also been in evidence at the International Conference on Interpretation hosted at the University of Turku in 1994. Under the motto of “taking stock”, the state of the art in interpreting research was found to include both established and new topics and lines of work (Gambier et al. 1997). Thus, rather than showcasing the new post-Trieste paradigm of interdisciplinary conference interpreting research, the Turku Conference was a harbinger of much further diversification yet to come, as subsequently reflected in the Forlì Conference on Interpreting Studies at the close of the decade (Garzone and Viezzi 2002).

Opening and linking up

The early 1990s were in many ways a crucial time in the evolution of interpreting research. The account of it in the previous section foregrounded the move from the Paris School or IT paradigm to a more rigorously scientific approach at the beginning of the decade. All the while, research interest centred on simultaneous conference interpreting, and in particular its cognitive process (CP). But just as this new CP paradigm, which sought to capitalise on insights from the cognitive sciences, was achieving a measure of institutionalisation, the ground beneath the interpreting research community started shifting, giving rise to a much wider and more varied landscape which called for a remapping and a search for new pathways.

Broadening the field

For most of the twentieth century, professional interpreting was seen to take place primarily in international conferences and organisations, and sometimes in international tribunals. University-level training programmes after World War II were geared to those settings, as was most of the
research done in the 1970s and 1980s. Other types of interpreting, such as liaison interpreting in diplomatic and business contexts, received little separate coverage and were subsumed under the high-level skills profile of conference interpreting. And yet, starting already in the 1960s, interpreting needs began to emerge in some countries and social contexts that ultimately demanded a different professional response. One of these strands was the provision of interpreting services for deaf people, particularly in the US. Based on a legal mandate for service provision, professional bodies such as the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) and the Conference of Interpreter Trainers (CIT) managed to promote training and certification, and doctoral research on signed language interpreting (SLI) was under way by the 1980s. Other countries moved in a similar direction, though often with considerable delay (see Chapter 7 on sign language interpreting).

The second, even more comprehensive social development engendering new interpreting needs and practices was large-scale migration. Immigration countries like Australia and Sweden took the lead in providing communicative support services to newly arrived residents. Thus, a telephone interpreting service and a healthcare interpreting service were set up in New South Wales in the 1970s, and a national accreditation authority (NAATI) was created in Australia to validate translational skills and accredit training courses. In these and other countries, measures to ensure communication through the provision of interpreting services were a matter of policy and legislation, which explains the highly uneven development of interpreting in institutional settings throughout the world (see Chapter 14 on community interpreting).

Among government or public service institutions, the most advanced domain in terms of interpreting service provision is often the criminal justice system, thanks to human rights provisions guaranteeing a fair trial to those not speaking the language of the court. Again, the level of professionalisation is quite uneven, but most countries have some degree of regulation for the domain of legal or court interpreting. And since many countries in the latter decades of the twentieth century received significant migration flows, including asylum-seekers, interpreting needs ‘in the community’ – in legal, healthcare, social service and educational settings – became too pressing to be ignored, by public authorities or scholars of interpreting (see Chapters 12–17 for more detailed discussion of each of these contexts).

Against this background, it is not surprising that pioneering studies on interpreting in community settings were done by SLI researchers, linguists and communication scholars in the US and Sweden, with few links to the newly emerged conference interpreting studies community of the early 1990s. This was evident at the First International Conference on Interpreting in Legal, Health, and Social Service Settings, held in 1995 at Geneva Park near Toronto. Its theme of “The Critical Link: Interpreters in the Community” not only gave visibility to an emerging profession but also applied to the two developmental strands mentioned above: Since SLI often takes place in community (public service) settings, the conference united practitioners across modalities, and spoken-language community interpreters easily realised the benefits of linking up with signed language interpreters who were at a relatively more advanced stage of professionalisation. The Critical Link, which became institutionalised as a series of conferences held every three years, offered a broad interface between spoken and signed language interpreting in community settings, as reflected in the research published in the various volumes of selected conference proceedings (e.g. Carr et al. 1997). It was only in the twenty-first century that Critical Link conferences seemed to draw closer to more established conference interpreting circles – or the other way round.

As reviewed above, research on interpreting has been shaped decisively by the emergence of new social and professional practices, and the rise of community interpreting in the 1990s greatly expanded the object of study for scholars of interpreting – provided, that is, they were ready to accept that social needs for interpreting were often met by less than professional arrangements. In contrast to the domain of international conference interpreting, where a high
level of professionalism (thanks not least to years of university-level training) is regarded as an unquuestionable norm, community interpreting practices are highly diverse, and researchers are likely to find bilingual volunteers and children serving as interpreters as part of their purview (see Chapter 26 for a discussion of non-professional interpreters). Thus, the field of interpreting studies has become much broader by opening up to less than professional practices (and the social forces behind them) as forming part of the object of study. Not surprisingly, this has also been reflected in the field’s theoretical and methodological orientations.

**Extending foundations**

The transition from the Paris School paradigm to the new, interdisciplinary outlook on the scientific study of cognitive processing in interpreting, including its neurolinguistic foundations, can be viewed as deepening the field’s foundations. The lead discipline was cognitive psychology, with ramifications ranging from memory research and comprehension tests to expertise studies and the analysis of verbal protocols. In its neurolinguistic dimension, access to brain imaging technologies promised a closer view of the neurophysiological substrate of cognitive activity during interpreting (e.g. Tommola et al. 2000).

The cognitive perspective was also dominant in newer linguistic and text-oriented approaches. Examples include the adoption of psycholinguistic insights into strategies of text comprehension and production (Kalina 1998) and the application of Relevance Theory for a “cognitive-pragmatic” analysis of SI (Setton 1999). Much more than “text”, however, which often implied a monologic view of language, the concept of “discourse” became pivotal to the study of language use in general, and also proved highly appropriate to the analysis of interpreting in dialogic face-to-face communication.

Rather than text linguistics, which had inspired a fair amount of interpreting research on such topics as cohesion and intertextuality, discourse studies, or discourse analysis, was increasingly adopted as a broad framework for research into dialogue interpreting. While discourse analysis is strongly rooted in linguistics, it has been sourced by linguistic anthropology as well as interactional sociolinguistics and hence includes sociological approaches to the study of interaction. Pioneering work with this orientation in the field of signed and spoken language interpreting was done by Cynthia Roy (2000) and Cecilia Wadensjö (1998), respectively. Wadensjö in particular, who studied Russian-Swedish immigration and medical interviews as “triadic interaction”, opened up a new perspective on the study of discourse in interaction, drawing not on translation theory but on the sociology of Erving Goffman. Since Wadensjö’s work is not limited to borrowing concepts and models (such as Goffman’s participation framework) from other disciplines, but also establishes a new working method for the study of interpreting as a socially situated activity, she has done much to establish a new paradigm in interpreting research, centred on the descriptive analysis of discourse in interaction (DI). Methodologically, the DI paradigm relies on the recording and transcription of authentic discourse data and applies various analytical tools to study such aspects of mutually shaped interaction as turn-taking, positioning, face and footing in a range of intra-social institutional settings.

In addition to the micro-sociological look at language use in interaction, the concern with dialogue interpreting in institutional settings strongly suggests the adoption of a wider (meso-)sociological perspective to analyse communication policies and power structures and the resulting constraints on language use in a given social institution. Fieldwork relying on participant observation and interviews as well as recordings of interaction is the methodological strategy of choice for such studies of interpreting as a socially situated practice. An early example of such work in the hospital setting is the doctoral thesis by Brad Davidson (1998).
Clearly, the shift of emphasis from studying cognitive processes in the interpreter to studying interpreting processes in social institutions was associated with a greater use of social science methods such as qualitative interviews. These are also germane to studies on a macro-social level that seek to explain interpreting in social fields with reference to social theories. Bourdieu’s concept of habitus has proved particularly attractive, with Inghilleri’s (2003) work on interpreters in asylum settings as a case in point.

In summary, the theoretical and methodological frameworks applied in research into interpreting came to reflect enormous breadth, as interpreting scholars widened their focus in the course of the 1990s to include the most diverse manifestations of the object of study in their purview. Over the last quarter century, research efforts have therefore gone in many different directions, and it would be impossible to summarise the state of the art in the space of a few pages. Some major topics of investigation can nevertheless be identified, and the following section will briefly introduce and review recent work under seven thematic headings.

**Major topics**

The present chapter so far has offered a sketch of the evolution of interpreting research over the last half century. It has aimed to show what was done, when, and by whom, and also, on a broader methodological level, how. This section, in contrast, will give a summary account of the research questions, methods and findings represented in the literature under various topics.

**Memory**

Memory is the cornerstone of interpreting as a complex cognitive process. What is known as long-term memory plays an evidently crucial role in “classic”, note-based, consecutive interpreting, but there has been surprisingly little research on this topic. Rather, with interest focused on the simultaneous mode, the type of memory under study has been working memory (WM), which, according to Baddeley (1992), provides both temporary storage and executive control functions. Storage-related predictions of the Baddeley model were investigated by Shlesinger (2000), who found evidence that concurrent articulation during SI inhibited short-term retention, and that phonological memory traces in WM decayed within some two seconds, making it more difficult for simultaneous interpreters to cope with high-storage-load-inducing material at slower input speeds.

A fundamental and controversial issue in relation to WM has been its capacity, as measured with various span tasks. Padilla et al. (1995) found that trained interpreters outperformed students on the digit span task (i.e. memorising auditorily presented series of up to nine digits) and showed more efficient allocation of attentional resources. Using a listening span task, Liu (2001) tested whether it was WM capacity or expertise that explained differences in her 33 subjects’ SI performance on critical sentences manipulated for difficulty. In the absence of significant WM capacity differences between her three groups of subjects, Liu concluded that superior performance came from expertise in interpreting corresponding to the efficient management of attentional (WM) resources.

The critical role of attentional control (i.e. the central executive rather than the storage function of WM) was confirmed by Timarová (2012), who had 28 professional subjects complete a battery of five executive WM tasks and an SI task, and concluded from her correlational analysis that different WM functions predicted different sub-processes of SI in complex (many-to-many) patterns. On the whole, then, the study of WM in (simultaneous) interpreting has evolved from a concern with storage functions and memory capacity to a view in which WM appears as an attention management centre controlling the execution of various processing tasks.
Performance

The notion of ‘performance’ is used in interpreting studies in relation to both the process and the product of interpreting, as well as to the interpreter’s behaviour in interaction. In its cognitive process dimension, a major analytical tool is the notion of “strategy”, which refers to goal-oriented operations under intentional control. Aside from the strategies posited by psycholinguists for monolingual language processing, a variety of strategies have been identified and investigated in relation to interpreting, and particularly SI. Aside from “offline” strategies in conference interpreting such as document preparation, strategic performance has been discussed mainly in terms of coping with difficult input, such as numbers, enumerations or syntactic asymmetries. Such coping strategies or tactics in SI include chunking (segmentation), stalling, anticipation and compression, and research findings on these and other techniques can guide teachers in helping students to develop their problem-solving skills and enhance their overall performance (e.g. Gile 2009).

Irrespective of the input variables that have been found to impact the process, and the strategies employed to cope with them, the interpreter’s performance ultimately manifests itself in his or her textual product or output, which also serves as a basis for evaluation. The quality of an interpreting performance is then broken down into output variables, such as cohesion, fluency and correct terminology, which are believed to shape interpreting service users’ overall judgments to varying degrees. Research on the relative importance of such quality criteria has been carried out from the perspectives of both interpreters and users, mainly in the form of surveys (e.g. Kurz 2001). Not surprisingly, the top-ranking criterion is that the interpretation should be a faithful reflection of the original utterance. However, experimental research on user judgments vs. expectations (e.g. Collados Aís 2002) suggests that supposedly secondary aspects of an interpreter’s performance, such as intonation and accent, may have a significant impact on overall assessment (see Chapter 23 on quality, and Chapter 24 on assessment).

A detailed breakdown of relevant facets of an interpreter’s performance is difficult enough in SI, but even more challenging in consecutive interpreting, where the interpreter is performing in situ in the fullest sense. In face-to-face communication, the interpreter’s non-verbal behaviour is not limited to vocal and prosodic characteristics but includes a wide range of visual signals that can impact the interaction, from gaze movement and facial expression to posture and physical positioning. Questions of cultural appropriateness, trust and social identity must be added to the behavioural mix, so that the description and analysis of interpreting performance in dialogic interaction becomes an enormous analytical challenge (see Chapter 6 on consecutive interpreting and Chapter 8 on the comparison of signed and spoken interpretation).

Aptitude

Ever since the pioneering work of Sanz (1930), aptitude for interpreting has been the subject of research and reflection, whether the assumption was that “interpreters are born, not made” or that they were “made, not born” (Mackintosh 1999). As the number of interpreter training programs worldwide continues to rise, and in the face of scarce educational resources, the need to identify those candidates for training that are most likely to succeed is as pressing as ever. There is considerable agreement on a long list of criteria that applicants should fulfil, from high levels of proficiency in their working languages and broad general knowledge, to the mental abilities involved in comprehension and expression under time pressure. In the field of conference interpreting, most institutions perform some kind of screening for graduate-level admission, but there is little consensus on which test would be most effective in predicting successful program
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completion (Russo 2011). Among the most frequently used is a consecutive summary, that is, a memory-based rendering of a short speech (of a few minutes) designed to test source-language comprehension, analytical and memory skills as well as fluency of expression in the target language. Given the challenge of reliable scoring, experimental alternatives include simultaneous paraphrasing (ibid.) and variations on the cloze test, but the search for a viable and effective aptitude test for would-be interpreters is still on, even for the “hard” cognitive skills.

As highlighted at the international symposium on “Aptitude for Interpreting” held at Lessius University College in Antwerp in 2008 (Shlesinger and Pöchhacker 2011), interpreter educators in signed and spoken languages agree that cognitive abilities, though undoubtedly significant, do not give a complete picture of aptitude, and that a wide range of soft skills, from motivation and learning styles to emotional stability and anxiety, must be taken into account. But while some evidence of the role of personality traits has been found, there is little certainty regarding the type of traits to test for and their relative weight in the overall prediction of success in program completion and professional practice.

Teaching

Assuming that candidates possessing the required knowledge, skills and personality traits have been found, the issue to focus on in interpreter education, aside from such topics as curriculum design and assessment (Sawyer 2004), is the most appropriate way to teach. Much of the literature in this respect has been generated in the field of signed language interpreting. The Conference of Interpreter Trainers, a US-based professional body, launched its own dedicated journal, the International Journal of Interpreter Education, in 2009, and Gallaudet University Press publishes an “Interpreter Education Series” (e.g. Roy 2005). Since much SLI work takes places in community settings, the sustained pedagogical development in that field stands to benefit trainers of spoken-language community interpreters in particular, who often teach outside an academic context and thus without the resource base of higher-education institutions. Recent advances in this regard include the Practical Teaching Guide by Rudvin and Tomassini (2011) and didactic proposals inspired by theatre studies. Kadrić (2011), for instance, enriches the common use of reality-based role-plays in dialogue interpreter training by adapting exercises from the Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed, letting students experience and critically reflect on how different problem-solving options can empower the interpreter in fraught situations of inequity.

Helping interpreting students become reflective practitioners is nowadays acknowledged as a main goal of interpreter education across domains and modalities. For conference interpreting, with its 80–year tradition of institutionalised academic training, this implies a particularly long trajectory. For many decades, and well into the twenty-first century, training practices followed the apprenticeship model (Sawyer 2004: 76), with practicing professionals as “masters” instructing students to do as they did, offering material for learning by doing as well as feedback on students' performances. More recently, a move toward student-centred learning, underpinned by a social constructivist approach to education, has foregrounded the development of metacognitive skills involving such tools as self-analysis and peer feedback. Guidance has also been drawn from the psychology of expertise to understand the different stages and challenges in the process of skill development (Moser-Mercer 2000).

As regards the actual skills students need to acquire, the literature on conference interpreter training reflects considerable consensus and some controversy (Mackintosh 1999). It is generally accepted that students should be introduced to interpreting in the consecutive mode, initially based on memory, before the gradual incorporation of note-taking (Seleskovitch and Lederer 1989). When and how SI training in the booth should commence is moot. SI skills may be
acquired both after extended training in consecutive and in parallel, and the technique of SI may be taught step by step, with preliminary exercises such as shadowing and paraphrasing, or through natural progression by adjusting task difficulty in terms of speech type, speed and technicality. As with other training issues, there are few, if any, conclusive findings to support opposite views, so that research on teaching practices remains on the agenda (see Chapter 25 on pedagogy).

**History**

As noted at the outset, research on interpreting throughout the twentieth century has essentially been concerned with contemporary practices. Among the rare exceptions is the chapter by Bowen et al. (1995) in the volume on *Translators through History*, which draws extensively on the essays by Thieme et al. (1956). Understandably, expertise in historical research among interpreting scholars trained for the profession is rare. And yet, there have been major advances over the past two decades, so much so that research into interpreters and interpreting in history is now a productive line of investigation. An early example of note is the 1996 MA thesis by Francesca Gaiba, subsequently published as a monograph that is widely regarded as the most authoritative account of the Nuremberg Trial (Gaiba 1998). Closely related to it is the groundbreaking study by Kayoko Takeda (2010) on the Tokyo War Crimes Trial, and further work on tribunal interpreting has also been published by graduates at the University of Mainz at Germersheim.

An exceptional figure in historical research into interpreting is Jesús Baigorri-Jalón, a Spanish UN staff interpreter in New York, who used his academic background in history to good effect in a doctoral thesis on the history of conference interpreting. Thanks to his research in Geneva archives, supplemented by additional sources, Baigorri’s (2000) is the first detailed account ever of the invention of simultaneous (“telephonic”) interpreting. By the same token, his 2004 volume on *Interpreters at the United Nations* provides the first history of professional interpreting in the early high-profile setting of the UN (Baigorri 2004). What is more, Baigorri also directed his interest much further back in history and promoted research on Spain’s rich heritage of interpreter use in conquest and colonisation, including collaborative ties with fellow researchers in South America. (See Chapter 1 on the history of interpreting, in which Baigorri elaborates on these ideas.)

An incomparably richer and longer heritage in the field of interpreting can be assumed for China. And yet it was not until recently that Rachel Lung (2011) published a first monographic study in English that examines the identity, ethics and status of interpreters in early Imperial China. The potential for further work in this context is probably enormous, and this assumption would apply equally to other regions with a longstanding multilingual and multicultural tradition, Africa being an obvious case in point.

**Role**

The study of interpreters in earlier times is also fertile ground for reflecting on the interpreter’s role, or roles. The figure of the dragoman, for instance, serves to highlight the fact that individuals with a command of two languages often assumed tasks that went beyond the strictly translational function of enabling communication across languages. In our day, this can be seen in the practices of ‘terps’ and ‘fixers’ working for US and Coalition forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. By the same token, though in an entirely different domain, interpreters in healthcare settings may also be expected to provide guidance and assistance to patients not familiar with the system. Even in a narrower, translational perspective, research has shown that interpreters do more than render the
utterances of the primary parties in another language. Wadensjö (1998) and Roy (2000), among others, have drawn attention to the interpreter’s discourse management function as reflected in clarification moves and turn-taking signals. In interaction constellations with highly discrepant cultural backgrounds, interpreters have also been attributed the function of a cultural mediator or clarifier, and for healthcare settings, as mentioned above, the most active role for interpreters has been described as that of a patient advocate. These different degrees of interpreter agency or intervention are often construed as a pyramid model, with the default role of “message converter” at its base and that of “message clarifier” and “cultural clarifier” at higher levels of intervention (CHIA 2002). However, discourse-based research has consistently shown that the notion of message conversion, which relies on the assumption of language as a conduit or channel, is not compatible with constructivist views of communication, as was indeed anticipated by Seleskovitch in her model of interpreting as a sense-making process.

The emergence of “role” as a research topic in interpreting studies was closely associated with the increasing acknowledgment of interpreting practices in community-based domains, most notably legal and healthcare settings. Since these settings are shaped by different institutional constraints, the debate on the community interpreter’s role, sparked off in the early 1990s, would inevitably remain controversial. As shown in the large-scale survey by Angelelli (2004), medical interpreters in her sample differed significantly from court interpreters in their self-perceived “visibility” or degree of agency in the interaction.

Angelelli’s survey instrument, the Interpersonal Role Inventory, was also administered to a sample of some 100 conference interpreters, whose responses made them out to be as “invisible” as court interpreters. In open comments, some also expressed the view that questions of agency and visibility did not fit with their ethos as impartial professionals, or at least did not arise in a typical conference setting. Some evidence to the contrary was collected in a fieldwork study by Diriker (2004), whereas the comprehensive survey by Zwischenberger (2013) among more than 700 AIIC members found conference interpreters’ self-descriptions of their role to range from the agent perspective of “enabler of communication”, “mediator” and “communicator” to more mechanical labels such as “bridge”, “link”, “conveyor”, “conduit”, “tool” and “instrument”. (See Chapters 12, 14, 15, 16 and 20, for further discussions of interpreter roles.)

Technology

Considering the role of equipment-based SI in attracting the interest of experimental psychologists, it is fair to say that research on interpreting was in part driven by technological innovation. With digital information and communication technologies advancing at an ever faster pace, this relationship has become more pronounced in recent decades. While interpreting booths and transmission systems may show little visible change, conference interpreters’ working environment and practices have been no less impacted by digital tools than those of other professions. Hardware and software for knowledge and terminology management and online information retrieval has become indispensable outside and also inside the booth (Rütten 2007), and the same applies to audiovisual resources and digital recording equipment. The latter has been employed also in situations of consecutive interpreting, giving rise to what is known as simultaneous consecutive (SimConsec). Instead of, or in addition to, relying on note-taking, the interpreter in this hybrid mode listens to and records the source speech and then renders it in simultaneous mode from a replay of the recording.

Much more momentous technology-induced changes, though, have been under way in two areas that until recently were rather marginal – remote interpreting and machine interpreting. Building on the German Verbmobil project of the 1990s, mobile devices are now being used
for speech-to-speech translation of dialogues in a development that may be only just beginning. Much more tangible at this point is the spread of videoconference (VC) technology for interpreter-mediated interactions, either in the form of a video link, with the interpreter present at one of the two locations, or as remote interpreting in the strict sense, with the interpreter in a remote location. Either arrangement has been tested and, in principle, found viable, in various types of criminal proceedings (Braun and Taylor 2012) and in multilingual conferences (Roziner and Shlesinger 2010) (see Chapter 22 on remote interpreting).

The use of remote interpreting has gained particular momentum in healthcare settings, often building on or replacing arrangements for remote interpreting over the phone, or telephone interpreting (Kelly 2008). Studies in the medical context comparing on-site interpreting to telephone and video remote interpreting suggest a preference for the former and for video over audio-only. This choice is not relevant for signed language interpreting, where VC technology has been widely embraced, at least by deaf users. Interpreters, in contrast, despite new job opportunities, have been more wary of the impact of video relay service and video remote interpreting on their working conditions and professional ecology (Brunson 2011) – a concern that applies to VC-based interpreting across domains and settings.

Over and above their impact on professional practices, digital technologies have of course been used – and investigated – in training (e.g. Gorm Hansen and Shlesinger 2007; Sandrelli and de Manuel Jerez 2007) and in research. In the latter, a major topic at the interface between technology and methodology is research based on large machine-readable corpora. The potential of this line of research had been identified some time ago (Shlesinger 1998) but has now come closer to being fully realised thanks to advances in speech recognition and acoustic analysis.

**Future directions**

The choice to end the review of selected research topics on the subject of technology makes for a smooth transition to future perspectives. Indeed, the ongoing trend toward the technologisation of interpreting is likely to continue, and thanks to global digital communication networks, interpreting in remote (video) mode could support the unprecedented internationalisation of what was once a personal service provided in situ. Researchers will struggle to keep up with such developments, more in terms of theory than methodology, thanks to progress in digital recording and in web-based survey data collection and analysis. Critical reflection may need to focus, among other things, on trends such as the technology–driven dehumanisation of interpreting and the deprofessionalisation of interpreting in settings where widespread multilingualism and bilinguality would favour recourse to interpreting in as “natural” a manner as it was practiced for thousands of years.

**Further reading**


This volume features recent approaches to the study of interpreting, ranging from fundamental methodological issues to practical examples of empirical work on professional interpreting in signed as well as spoken languages.


This textbook provides a comprehensive overview of the emergence and make-up of interpreting studies as a discipline and its main ideas, models and paradigms, and reviews the state of the art in research on the interpreting process, product, profession and pedagogy.
Evolution of interpreting research


References


PART II

MODES OF INTERPRETING
Introduction

Simultaneous interpreting first saw the light of day in the early 1920s when Edward Filene and A. Gordon-Finlay, using early telephone technology, developed the first so-called telephonic interpreting equipment. It was not until the fall of 1945, however, that simultaneous interpreting made its televised international debut during the Nuremberg Trials. Until then, interpretation at multilingual conferences was provided mainly in consecutive mode, requiring interpreters to take notes during the delivery of a speech in order to reconstitute it in a different language once the speaker had finished (see Chapter 1 for further discussion of the history of simultaneous interpreting). Some of the first conference interpreters eagerly embraced simultaneous interpreting, while many of them categorically rejected it. Over a half a century later, however, it has all but replaced consecutive interpreting in international meetings, and this is particularly true for meetings with more than two conference languages.

In spite of that, simultaneous interpreting as a profession is still shrouded in mystery, and the task itself appears to have lost little of its original potential to astonish. The uninitiated are still amazed by simultaneous interpreters’ ability to almost instantaneously, yet seemingly effortlessly, transfer what is said from one language into another. Researchers studying language and the brain are similarly impressed by the cognitive processes underlying the task and consider it one of the most difficult linguistic skills (Grosjean, 2011). And despite the fact that national, international and supranational organizations rely on the services of hundreds of simultaneous interpreters every day (DG Interpretation, 2010), simultaneous interpreting is still the object of misconceptions and is surrounded by popular views and dogmata. The importance of bilingualism, the issue of directionality, the relevance of language-specific factors and the role of visual input and physical presence are only some of the unresolved and hotly debated issues in the simultaneous interpreting world today. For while it may be true that many of these issues are under-researched and that we are currently unable to definitively answer many of these questions, it is probably also true that all too often introspection and speculation have taken the place of rigorous research, providing sometimes intuitive, but often unsubstantiated, answers.

This chapter takes a closer look at simultaneous interpreting, when and how it was introduced, and how and why it has become firmly established as the main interpreting mode at
multilingual conferences. Since simultaneous interpreting was made possible by the integration of both technical and human factors, an overview of both the technical and human requirements for the successful performance of the task will be provided, referring to some of the principal findings from the field of interpreting research with the most relevant results from the field of psycholinguistics. The chapter will conclude with an outlook on future developments in simultaneous interpreting.

**Definition of key terms**

Although simultaneous interpreting is a task that has evolved since its inception well almost 100 years ago, it is sometimes still defined by comparing it to consecutive interpreting (see Chapter 6). While legitimate – after all these are the two most widely used interpreting modes – such a definition inevitably falls short of a comprehensive description of the notion of simultaneous interpreting. This is very well illustrated by the fact that the first definition, from Herbert (one of the early simultaneous interpreters and interpreter trainers), identifies three varieties of simultaneous interpreting (Herbert, 1952). According to him, simultaneous interpretation included “whispering”, whereby interpreters sitting next to a conference delegate whisper their interpretation to them; “telephonic simultaneous”, whereby interpreters listen to the original through earphones and speak their interpretation into a microphone; and “translation at sight”, whereby interpreters receive a text written in one language and read it aloud in a different language (see Chapter 9 on sight translation). Although it is true that all three tasks require the relatively instantaneous transfer from verbal input in one language to verbal output in another, from a processing point of view, the three are rather dissimilar – perhaps different enough to revisit Herbert’s original definition.

In order to do so, it seems appropriate to begin with the current definition of simultaneous interpreting as suggested by the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC), according to which “in simultaneous mode, the interpreter sits in a booth with a clear view of the meeting room and the speaker and listens to and simultaneously interprets the speech into a target language” (AIIC, n.d., my emphasis). This definition is considerably more restrictive than Herbert’s. For example, it requires the simultaneous interpreter to sit in a booth, and we will see why this detail is important in processing terms in the section “Simultaneous interpreting: the technology” which discusses the technical features of simultaneous interpreting. AIIC’s definition further states that the interpreter listens to the original, rather than reading it, therefore putting “translation at sight” outside of its scope. The possible reasons for this limitation and the repercussions of written input on the process will be addressed in the section “Speed and density”. There are other forms of simultaneous interpreting, however, that can be reconciled with the main tenets put forward in the AIIC definition. Interestingly, AIIC recognizes the existence of “whispered interpreting”, defining it in similar terms as Herbert but giving it the status of a modality in its own right. Simultaneous interpreting with text, also called sight interpretation (Lambert, 2004), refers to a scenario in which interpreters receive a manuscript of an address to be delivered, allowing them to read along (or ahead) in the text while listening to the speech. Finally there is remote interpreting, whereby some or all conference participants are at a remote location and the interpreters receive the auditory and visual signal through a videoconferencing system, i.e. over earphones and on one or several screens (see Chapter 22 on remote interpreting). This chapter will discuss the development of simultaneous interpreting as defined by AIIC, and will clearly specify when other forms of simultaneous interpreting are discussed.
Simultaneous interpreting: the human factor

Simultaneous interpreting as a complex task

As already mentioned, when attempting to capture the essence of this novel task, early practitioners and teachers of simultaneous interpreting seemed to struggle conceptually with the link between what appeared to be both a listening and a speaking component. To fill this conceptual gap, they sometimes additionally invoked a translation component. Herbert (1952) conceived of the task as a three-component process consisting of understanding, conversion and delivery. Seleskovitch and Lederer (1984) similarly identified three principal components of simultaneous interpreting, more specifically comprehension, deverbalization and expression. These notions of “conversion” or “deverbalization”, unfortunately, remained underspecified and without scientific grounding.

As simultaneous interpreting became the object of more scholarly research, however, particularly thanks to psychologists in the 1970s, an attempt was made to explain the phenomenon by relying on existing knowledge about how language is processed. Psychologists like Barik (1973), for instance, conceived of the simultaneous interpreting task purely in terms of comprehension (reception and decoding) and production (encoding and emitting). Since then, many researchers have followed this approach and moved away from the quest for a discrete stage in the process that can be isolated and identified as the translation component of simultaneous interpreting. Instead, they have attempted to explain the complex process of simultaneous interpreting in terms of its sub-tasks (e.g. Moser-Mercer et al., 1994; Frauenfelder and Schriefers, 1997; Seeber, 2011) or at least in terms of existing faculties (e.g. Setton 2001). Rather than invoking a translation component, we could therefore conceive of the mental representation of an utterance (see Johnson-Laird’s “mental model”, 1983; or van Dijk and Kintsch’s “situational model”, 1983) as the interface between the comprehension and the production process, as this representation is believed to constitute the end point of the former and the starting point of the latter. According to this view, every incoming word of an utterance is integrated into a mental representation, keeping track of all participants, objects, locations and events described in it (Zwaan, 1999). This representation is constantly updated with incoming information, related to available world knowledge (Garrod et al., 1990), and then serves as basis for the production process, followed by grammatical and phonological encoding (Levelt, 1989). Among the challenges of simultaneous interpreting is the fact that the two processes temporally overlap and that, unlike in natural language production, the interpreter regularly has to begin the encoding process before the mental model is complete (see Chapter 4 for a discussion of the evolution of interpreting research).

First steps

When simultaneous interpreting was introduced, it was not welcomed by all conference interpreters, who until then had been working mainly in consecutive. Whereas some interpreters actively sought the challenge of this new mode, others categorically refused the transition to this new way of working, often dubbing it a “parroting exercise” and claiming that the product was of considerably inferior quality to that of a consecutive interpretation (Baigorri-Jalón, 2011). Having said that, we have little evidence suggesting that those interpreters who did not successfully acquire the skills needed for simultaneous interpreting were particularly proficient consecutive interpreters in the first place (Pearl, 1995). While some of the great consecutive interpreters’ mental abilities are by now legendary, such as those of André Kaminker, (Baigorri-Jalón, 2004),
the reports of interpreters summarizing, condensing, or simply not remembering or missing something, while very rare, do exist (Thomas, 1937). We will never know the extent to which the harsh criticism of simultaneous interpreting might have been influenced by consecutive interpreters’ fear of losing their spot in the limelight or their ability to steal delegates’ thunder with their celebrated oratory skills. Similarly, we can only speculate as to whether their staunch opposition was fuelled by some interpreters’ ineptitude at a task requiring additional skills to the ones they had supposedly mastered. What we do know is that the first simultaneous interpreters, or rather candidates considered apt to become simultaneous interpreters, were not easily found. Many of the experienced (consecutive) conference interpreters, “while possessing language mastery and good academic credentials, tended to be perfectionists and froze at the microphone when the right word did not come to mind immediately” (Ramler, 2007: 10). Recruiting trips to Switzerland, Paris and London were necessary to find 36 individuals who could be trained to perform the task at the Nuremberg Trials. This anecdotal evidence suggests that the ability to interpret consecutively did not automatically qualify interpreters to work in simultaneous, and that their previously acquired skills were not sufficient to perform this new task.

**On the difficulty of simultaneous interpreting**

At times it might appear that simultaneous interpreting should be an easy feat – after all, it combines two very robust language-processing tasks we all perform every day. And while there are those who argue that the different tasks involved in simultaneous interpreting can be accommodated comfortably (Setton, 2001), many researchers from within and outside the interpreting research paradigm describe simultaneous interpreting as being complex and difficult (Gile, 1995; Grosjean, 2011; Moser-Mercer, 1997; Rinne et al., 2000). Moreover, it seems to have been generally accepted from its inception that simultaneous interpreting was a difficult task. So much so, in fact, that one of the inventors of the first simultaneous equipment reports that it was “of a difficult and exacting nature, demanding special qualities on the part of the interpreters and particularly fatiguing owing to the degree of concentration involved” (Gordon-Finlay, 1927 in Baigorri-Jalón, 2011). Almost a century later, concentration remains the major difficulty reported by interpreting students even six months into their training (Moser-Mercer, 2000b). What is more, we now have evidence suggesting that it is the real-time combination of structurally similar tasks (e.g., language comprehension and language production) that makes their execution more difficult, since they draw upon the same mental resources and thus interfere with each other (Liu and Wickens, 1992; Wickens, 2002). Similarly, early observations included that “thirty minutes of consecutive [sic] work proved the maximum during which satisfactory translation could be made, after which the results were liable to deteriorate owing to fatigue” (ILO 1929 in Baigorri-Jalón, 2011). These observations were substantiated experimentally when Moser-Mercer et al., (1998) found a significant decrease in quality (as measured by serious meaning errors) after 30 minutes of continuous simultaneous interpreting.

**Simultaneous interpreting and memory**

One of the principal arguments for the complexity of simultaneous interpreting, and consequently the source of the perceived difficulty of the task, lies in the fact that it requires several different cognitive tasks to be carried out more or less concurrently (Lambert, 2004). As we have seen above, simultaneous interpreting requires language comprehension-related tasks, such as word recognition and semantic and syntactic decoding, to be carried out at the same time as language production-related tasks such as lexical selection and semantic and syntactic encoding. If we
conceive of the human processor, the brain, as a capacity-limited system (see, for example, Baddeley, 1999), the repercussions on the interpreter’s working memory become clear. Since the amount of sensory information that can be processed and stored is limited, tasks that may appear effortless when carried out individually start competing for the same processing resources when carried out simultaneously, slowing them down and making them less robust.

Very early on, interpreters’ ability to perform the simultaneous interpreting task was explained by what was assumed intuitively to be their good (working) memory (Herbert, 1952; Seleskovitch, 1968). Since then, however, several experiments have been carried out in an attempt to compare the memory capacity of interpreters to that of non-interpreters, with largely inconclusive and partially contradictory results (for an overview see Köpke and Signorelli, 2012). It is conceivable, then, that the complex task of simultaneous interpreting is possible not because of an increased memory capacity, but rather because some of the information processing in the brain has been automated. This automation would render these processes subconscious and less constrained by the brain’s capacity limits (Styles, 1997). In other words, practice, which has been shown to make almost perfect time sharing of concurrent tasks possible (Schumacher et al., 2001; Lambert, 2004), might lead to the automation of certain processes rather than to an increase in memory capacity.

**Simultaneous interpreting and bilingualism**

It is a truism that simultaneous interpreting is only possible because interpreters speak more than one language; after all, they need to understand one language while at the same time speaking another. However, the notion of bilingualism, its importance and its implications for the simultaneous interpreting process are still cause for disagreement in the field. Unlike many linguists, who are primarily interested in the processing differences between first and second languages, interpreting scholars appear to be chiefly concerned with interpreters’ second language proficiency. Given the applied nature of the task, this is certainly justified. However, this approach is also rather limiting and ill-suited to furthering our understanding of the process and developing research-based training approaches tailored for interpreters working into native and non-native languages.

In terms of the underlying processes involved, a distinction is generally drawn between languages acquired from birth and others that are learned at a later stage. While Krashen and Terrell’s (1983) distinction between language acquisition (the product of natural exposure) and language learning (the product of formal teaching) remains controversial, one difference between first and second language learners seems generally accepted: second language learners have already developed conceptual representations for the world surrounding them through their first language. New words in the second language may thus initially be associated with concepts through the first language, until the learner realizes the degree of overlap (or lack thereof) of concepts (De Bot et al., 2005). Consequently, second language proficiency depends on a myriad of factors including, but not limited to, age of acquisition, proximity of the languages involved, motivation and personality (Chenu and Jisa, 2009). Of all these factors, age of acquisition seems to be particularly relevant, as only languages acquired at an early age (during the so-called “critical period”, ranging approximately from conception to puberty) make use of a set of innate learning procedures allowing knowledge of the world to be acquired at the same time as the linguistic structures that apply to it. Languages learned later in life are believed to use different mechanisms relating back to the first language and engaging different processes (Wang and Kuhl, 2003; Moskovsky, 2001). This means that although second language learners can attain very high levels of proficiency, the underlying processing requirements might vary, and therefore
disadvantage them, compared to native speakers. These differences in processing structures and requirements are likely to come to the fore during a cognitively demanding task such as simultaneous interpreting.

**Simultaneous interpreting and directionality**

Professional conference interpreters do not interpret *from* all of their languages *into* all of their languages. In fact, while all work into at least one language (usually their native language) only some interpret into two and very few into more than two languages (AIIC, n.d.). Furthermore, while some interpreters may work into one or more of their languages in consecutive mode, they often do not do so in simultaneous mode. There are multiple reasons for this imbalance including ideological, theoretical and pragmatic considerations, and the boundaries among them are often blurred. In western European countries, for example, simultaneous interpreters have traditionally worked into their native language only, based on the idea that only the native language would enable them to express themselves naturally and idiomatically. The main focus, thus, was on the production component of the process. In the former Soviet Union, on the other hand, simultaneous interpreters worked primarily from their native language, based on the argument that only the native language would enable the interpreter to fully understand every nuance of the input. Both arguments inevitably hinge on the notion of language proficiency, which after all, is the visible and audible manifestation of the difference between acquired and learned languages. The extent to which second language proficiency directly translates to simultaneous interpreting proficiency into that language is as of yet unclear.

In trying to regulate the notion of directionality for professional conference interpreters, AIIC introduced a language classification system. According to this system, conference interpreters work into and out of their “A” languages (their native language or strict equivalent) and “B” languages (languages of which the interpreter has perfect command) but only out of their “C” languages (languages of which they have complete understanding). The crux of this system lies in the difficulty or impossibility of clearly defining and differentiating among A, B and C languages. In fact, although AIIC attempts a descriptive definition of the different language categories, the nomenclature used (i.e. “strict equivalent”, “perfect command” and “complete understanding”) reflects the limitations of an approach that inevitably leads to different interpretations. To further complicate the issue, market demands have prompted some interpreter training institutions and some practising professionals to apply a much more functional definition to interpreters’ languages. In other words, the choice of working into a language (or to be trained to work into a language) by definition makes that language a B language. Similarly, the choice of working from a particular language (or to be trained to work from that language) by definition makes that language a C language. This tendency has been countered by some institutional employers (e.g., the interpreting services of the European Institutions) and several of the most successful training institutions for interpreters (e.g., the schools belonging to the European Masters of Conference Interpreting) which apply rather strict selection criteria in order to avoid a purely functional approach to language combinations at the expense of quality.

Finally, several of the surveys conducted to date among conference participants seem to suggest that they do not attribute much importance to formal features such as pronunciation and accent (e.g. Donovan, 2002), which is often the most salient feature allowing the distinction between an A language and a B language. This is corroborated by research suggesting that accented speech is often not perceived as more difficult to understand (Shiri and Keysar, 2010). Critically, however, accented speech is perceived as less credible even when the speaker merely relays information from a native speaker (*ibid*), as is the case in interpreting. This last aspect and
its possible repercussions on interpreted communication have probably not yet received enough attention and should be considered by scholars attempting to define the quality of simultaneous interpreting into a B language (see Chapter 23 on quality).

**Problem triggers in simultaneous interpreting**

Simultaneous interpreting, while complex and difficult, is feasible provided a certain number of conditions are met. Interpreters need to be proficient in the languages they interpret between; they need to prepare the subject matter to be discussed; they need to have access to as much meeting-related visual and auditory information as possible; and they need to be given adequate technical equipment (Setton, 2005). Even then, however, certain features of the input have been identified as constituting particular problem triggers for simultaneous interpreters. These problem triggers do not appear to be limited to factors inhibiting ordinary language comprehension; rather, they only come to bear when multilingual language comprehension and language production overlap (cf. Setton, 1999). They include but are not limited to speed and density of input, presence of numbers in source speech, complex syntactic structures and speakers’ accents (Gile, 1995). What follows is a short discussion of how these triggers might affect simultaneous interpreting but not ordinary language comprehension.

**Speed and density**

Because of their interaction, speed and density of the source speech should probably be considered together rather than separately: while discourse with low lexical density presented at a high speaking rate can be perceived as slow, discourse with high lexical density presented at a low speaking rate can be perceived as fast. Speed and density have been shown not to hinder ordinary language comprehension. Specifically, speaking rates between 100 and 200 words per minute are considered normal (Mayer, 1988), while discourse presented at up to 500 words per minute does seem to significantly affect comprehension (Voor and Miller, 1965). Early practitioners recommended 100 to 120 words per minute as the ideal speaking rate for simultaneous interpreting (Seleskovitch, 1978; Lederer, 1981), while AIIC advocates a speaking rate of approximately 130 words per minute (AIIC, n.d.). In reality, however, these recommended speaking rates are often substantially exceeded. At the Human Rights Council of the United Nations, for example, speaking rates have been found to average 150 words per minute and to reach almost 190 words per minute (Barghout et al., 2012). Discourse presented at this speed may well push the human brain to and beyond its limits and has been found to cause omissions, substitutions and pronunciation errors (Pio, 2003), and to decrease anticipation accuracy (Seeber, 2005).

**Numbers**

Numbers are also known to cause problems for simultaneous interpreters, possibly because they differ from ordinary verbal input in at least three aspects: conceptual substrate, frequency and imageability. Unlike ordinary words, numbers are not typically linked to any sort of conceptual representation (with noteworthy exceptions such as well-known dates, etc.), they often cannot be anticipated, they do not usually contain redundant information and they are generally not imageable beyond their visual numerical form.

Language comprehension normally depends on the fact that, in order to produce meaningful words and sentences within a given language, sounds can only be combined in a finite number of ways. This means that a comprehender will encounter a particular sequence of sounds, words
or phrases more frequently than others. Owing to the incremental nature of language comprehension (Altmann and Kamide, 1999; Kamide et al., 2003), the human brain depends on this limitation in order to anticipate possible continuations of words and sentences, and by doing so, make the process more efficient (Federmeier, 2007). Numbers, on the other hand, can be expressed in almost infinite combinations. They, therefore, are not subject to the same kind of frequency-contingent constraints and do not allow the same kind of anticipatory processing, which increases the processing load on the brain. Moreover, two or more words of a sentence might contain the same or very similar information, a phenomenon known as redundancy. Again, the human brain takes advantage of this phenomenon, as it is likely that information already processed can be integrated at less processing cost. During the processing of numbers, however, such redundancy does not exist, as every digit expresses a unique meaning. Finally, we know that imageable words, i.e. words describing concrete concepts that can readily be imagined, are easier to process than non-imageable words (Paivio et al., 1994). Given that, with few exceptions, numbers are not imageable, it stands to reason that they might be inherently more difficult to process than other words. From this short discussion, we may conclude that numbers are more difficult to comprehend than ordinary verbal input. It would appear plausible to assume that in a cognitively demanding task such as simultaneous interpreting, this difficulty is exacerbated. This conclusion is supported by experimental evidence showing that the quality of simultaneous interpretation decreases significantly in segments containing numbers (Mazza, 2001; Puková, 2008).

Syntax

From early reading comprehension studies, we know that some syntactic structures, e.g. nesting structures, are more difficult to process than others (Chomsky and Miller, 1963). Other structures, such as verb-final sentences (in languages allowing such constructions), counter-intuitively do not seem to affect the comprehension process. In fact, reading studies show an increase in reading speed (and therefore probably facilitated processing) towards the end of verb-final structures (Konieczny, 1996). It is thus likely that by the time readers arrive at the end of a sentence, lexical, contextual, computational and frequency-related constraints (Gibson and Pearlmutter, 1998) will have allowed the brain to narrow down the possibilities of the sentence-final verb to a minimum. Simultaneous interpreters producing elements in their output before they have been uttered in the input, and, by doing so, anticipating the speaker, may therefore merely verbalize elements that any ordinary comprehenders may also have conceptualized. To conclude from this evidence that syntactic differences between languages are irrelevant or negligible for the simultaneous interpreting process might be tenuous, however (cf. Setton, 1999). Unlike readers or comprehenders, simultaneous interpreters rarely have the benefit of hearing an entire sentence up to the last missing word prior to starting their interpretation. Given that the average lag between the original input and today’s simultaneous interpreters’ output is approximately two to four seconds (see Timarová et al., 2011 for a comprehensive discussion of ear-voice span in simultaneous interpreting), such syntactic differences are indeed likely to cause an increase in processing load, as supported by empirical evidence (Seeber and Kerzel, 2012).

Accents

In order to discuss the difficulty that accented source speech may represent during simultaneous interpreting, it is important to unambiguously define the concept. In fact, while linguists use the notion of “accent” to refer to phonological-phonetic variations of speech, and thus its
phonological and prosodic features (Adank et al., 2009), professional interpreters often seem to include lexical and syntactic deviation specifically in their understanding of foreign accents (Pöchhacker, 2004). In practical terms, it may be true that many non-native speakers display all the above deviations in their speech. In order to isolate individual problem triggers, however, it is important to differentiate between accents in the strict sense of the term, and grammatically, stylistically and idiomatically non-standard forms of a language. This is particularly true for English, which has been increasingly prevalent as the language used by speakers (regardless of native language) at international conferences. English spoken by non-native speakers has recently been labelled English as a lingua franca (ELF) with some of its proponents advocating its recognition as a language in its own right (for an overview see Channing, 2005). Such non-standard forms of English constitute a challenge for simultaneous interpreters because they already represent a compound of potential individual problem triggers (e.g., non-standard use of lexicon, grammar, syntax, style, intonation and accent). At the same time, however, its heterogeneous nature makes ELF impossible to define formally and thus impossible to isolate as an individual problem trigger. I will therefore limit the discussion of accents to two types of speakers: firstly, proficient speakers of a standard variety of a language who, while producing grammatically and syntactically correct sentences, can be identified as non-native speakers due to phonological and phonetic deviations; and secondly, native speakers of unfamiliar (regional) varieties of a language, such as Scottish English or Australian English. We know, for instance, that native listeners make more comprehension mistakes when listening to speakers of a second language (Clarke and Garrett, 2004) and that speech processing is less efficient for unfamiliar native accents (Floccia et al., 2006). This decline in processing efficiency is rather subtle in quiet conditions but becomes more noticeable under adverse listening conditions, possibly because phonetic cues relevant for comprehension might be masked (ibid.). As simultaneous interpreting is a task taking place under adverse listening conditions, with interpreters having to listen to the original input and their own output, comprehension is likely to be negatively affected by accented speech. This rationale is borne out by empirical studies showing that interpreting accuracy decreases significantly with phonemic and prosodic deviations (Lin et al., 2013).

Simultaneous interpreting with text

A somewhat special, yet not uncommon, scenario regularly compounding the above problem triggers is the simultaneous interpretation of prepared texts read aloud by a conference presenter rather than expressed extemporaneously (Setton and Motta, 2007). Simultaneous interpreting with text entails the oral rendition of an orally presented text in a different language that is also available in writing (Gile, 1997; Chernov, 2004; but also Pöchhacker, 2004 for a different nomenclature). When manuscripts of the read texts are made available to the interpreter, a task primarily mediated through the auditory-verbal channel is transformed into a potentially even more complex multi-modal task including a strong visual-verbal component. It is as yet unclear how the availability of the written text affects the complexity of the task. One of the few experiments comparing (student) interpreters’ performance during simultaneous with and without text showed that they performed significantly better during simultaneous with text (Lambert, 2004). It is important to add, however, that the design of the experiment makes it impossible to establish whether performance was affected by the availability of the text during the task, the preparation of the text prior to the task, or both.

Furthermore, the claim that little or no interference should occur between the auditory and visual input provided that the speaker does not digress from the text (ibid.) is only true when
the message is presented and processed simultaneously on both channels. This means that the interpreter would have to read the text at exactly the speed at which the source speech is read. The extent to which interpreters read the accompanying text ahead of the speaker, in synch with the speaker or after the speaker, however, is unknown. Even if such synchronicity were given, the resulting redundancy effect would be likely to increase accuracy while at the same time reducing efficiency, in other words slowing down the process (Wickens et al., 2011). The dearth of scientific evidence on simultaneous interpreting with text means that a large part of our limited knowledge stems from circumstantial and subjective evidence. Cammoun et al.’s survey among 50 professional conference interpreters, for instance, reveals that 92% perceive the text as helpful, as compared to only 2% who see it as a hindrance (Cammoun et al., 2009). They furthermore bring to bear the argument that many interpreter training institutions include simultaneous interpreting with text in their curriculum, suggesting that this task is indeed different enough from ordinary simultaneous interpreting to warrant specific training. Only a more systematic process analysis, however, will shed light on whether and to what extent the two processes differ and how the additional visual-verbal component affects this already complex language-processing task. (See also Chapter 9 on sight translation.)

The simultaneous interpreter’s profile

Over 50 years ago, Herbert (1952) insisted that a good interpreter needed personal qualities like “nervous resistance” and “readiness of speech”, intellectual gifts like power of concentration, quickness of mind and good memory, as well as moral attributes like self-control and a sense of responsibility. Above all, however, Herbert was convinced that interpreters’ value depended on their “culture”, i.e. general knowledge. It is interesting to see that half a century later, AIIC (n.d.) identifies very similar traits as being necessary to become a good interpreter: the polished command of the native language; the complete mastery of non-native languages; familiarity with the cultures of countries in which these languages are spoken; as well as the ability to concentrate and focus, calm nerves, tact and a sense of humour. Crucially, while the first consecutive and simultaneous conference interpreters were self-taught, there seems to be a wide consensus that conference interpreters can be and should be trained. Because of the complexity of the task and the time it takes to acquire, however, most top interpreting programmes apply rather strict admission criteria in an effort to screen applicants at least for some of the skills considered to be directly related to interpreting, such as language and communication skills, comprehension skills, analytical skills and general knowledge (for a comprehensive list, see Timarová and Ungoed-Thomas, 2008). On average, one in four applicants is admitted, and among the top schools, this ratio can be as low as one in 12. The fact that few interpreting programmes have graduation rates above 70% suggests that not all predictors for the successful acquisition of the task have been identified, and that factors such as motivation and teachability might play a significant role. The process of finding candidates capable of acquiring the skills necessary to perform the simultaneous interpreting task, therefore, is as difficult today as it was 70 years ago when the first teams were put together for the Nuremberg Trials.

Simultaneous interpreting: the technology

Early days

The technology enabling simultaneous interpretation in the first place goes back almost a century. By observing interpreters whispering to delegates, the American businessman, social entrepreneur
and philanthropist Edward A. Filene understood the mechanics of what was de facto a form of simultaneous interpreting and realized the importance of separating the incoming stream of sound from the outgoing one, so as to minimize auditory interference. Consequently, he conceived of a system comprising a booth with headsets, feeding the sound of the original to the interpreters and a microphone feeding the sound of the interpretation to the delegates (Baigorri-Jalón, 2004). The first interpreting booths, which at the Nuremberg Trials in 1945 were little more than a few glass partitions without a ceiling, had evolved into built-in, soundproof structures by the time the UN General Assembly took place in Flushing Meadows two years later. Interestingly, however, until very recently the interpreter’s workplace underwent relatively few changes (see Figure 5.1). Similarly, although the telephone technology originally repurposed for the Filene-Finlay simultaneous interpreting system, including clunky microphones and unwieldy headsets, gradually gave way to more sophisticated and ergonomic equipment, it appears that until very recently these changes were only minor. Today the specifications for the simultaneous interpreter’s workplace, the interpreting booth, are laid down in two ISO standards. ISO 2603 defines the specifications for built-in booths in an attempt to ensure the acoustic separation between languages, efficient two-way communication between the interpreters and delegates and a comfortable working environment for interpreters (ISO, 1998a). It provides details about technical requirements (acoustics, insulation, etc.), as well as ergonomic requirements (size, visibility, air circulation etc.). Its fraternal twin, standard ISO 4043, provides the same specifications for mobile simultaneous interpreting booths.

**What has changed?**

While simultaneous conference interpreters still sit in soundproof interpreting booths, listening to delegates over earphones and speaking their interpretation into a microphone, more often than not, today they are surrounded not only by a lot of paper documents but also by a lot of technology. Video screens in booths have become a necessity in multilingual institutions such as the European Parliament, not in order to replace the direct view of the meeting room, but rather to complement it; in meeting rooms accommodating well over 700 MEPs speaking up to 24 official languages, the interpreting booths are inevitably located at a distance or an angle that makes it impossible to see all the speakers. Indeed, one of the most far-reaching changes in the profession, or in the way in which the profession is practised, came with the advent of modern information and communication technology. The spread of truly portable personal computers combined with ever more widely available wireless access to the internet has allowed interpreters to harness this technology and access conference documents and
terminology databases in real time. However, because of the indirect nature of traditional interfaces, e.g., mouse or keyboard, the advantage of having access to additional real-time information was most likely offset by a considerable cost in terms of memory and attention. A major breakthrough came in 2010 with the release of tablet computers which, thanks to their tactile technology, made the interface more intuitive and probably less effortful. Today, tablet computers are no longer a rarity in interpreting booths (Hof, 2012); in fact, some employers (e.g. The Union of European Football Associations) have gone entirely paperless for some of their meetings and provide all conference documents on a tablet computer for conference delegates and interpreters alike. It stands to reason that while older generations of interpreters might find this transition difficult, for younger generations, so-called “digital natives” who have been raised with these new technologies (see Baigorri-Jalón, 1999), the transition might be relatively smooth.

**What lies ahead?**

The communication technologies we use every day are inevitably also making their way into the conference room, and technologies for VoIP (Voice or Video over Internet Protocol) transmissions are no exception. As a consequence, over the past decade the question about their integration in a simultaneous interpreting environment has been asked repeatedly. The feasibility of remote interpreting (see Figure 5.2), a technology-enhanced simultaneous interpreting mode whereby the interpreters follow and interpret conference proceedings from a remote location with the aid of television screens capturing what goes on in the meeting room (for a more detailed discussion see Chapter 22), has been rather controversial.

![Figure 5.2 Remote interpreting (European Council 2011; European Commission Photo, used with permission).](image)
The debate surrounding it, however, is sometimes reminiscent of that surrounding the introduction of simultaneous interpreting almost a hundred years ago: what simultaneous interpreting was to many consecutive interpreters then, remote interpreting appears to be to many simultaneous interpreters today. One crucial difference between now and then is that, unlike a hundred years ago, today we have research findings informing the debate, as several experiments have been carried out to test the technical feasibility of the technology and its impact on the human factor. For example, we know that issues of sound and image quality and synchronicity can be fixed, and that the overall quality of the output need not suffer, provided certain conditions are met. Importantly, however, interpreters report feeling a lack of participation, alienation and loss of concentration as well as increased fatigue and reduced self-perceived quality (Mouzourakis, 2003, 2006). Much like during the introduction of simultaneous interpreting, however, these perceptions might be subject-contingent variables destined to disappear with the generational shift taking place in the profession. It is important to keep in mind that the most recent large-scale experiment on remote interpreting was carried out in 2004 at the European Parliament on a population aged 45 years on average. In other words, participating interpreters had little or no experience with technologies such as Skype (released in 2003), Facebook (released in 2004) or Twitter (released in 2006), which by now have become household names and may have influenced the way in which the new generation of interpreters reacts to the virtual environment. The fact that since 2011 remote interpreting has been used successfully for working lunches and dinners of the European Council (Vereycken, 2012) might be a first indication that a technology considered “unacceptable” by AIIC just over 10 years earlier (AIIC, 2000) could in fact bring about a revolution like the one the profession experienced with the introduction of simultaneous interpreting a hundred years ago.

Further reading

Baigori-Jalón J (2014) From Paris to Nuremberg: the birth of conference interpreting. Translated by Mikkelson H and Slaughter Olsen B. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. In its fourth edition, this monograph provides one of the most comprehensive accounts of the evolution of conference interpreting, including the transition from consecutive to simultaneous interpreting.


References


Simultaneous interpreting


Simultaneous interpreting


6

CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETING

Debra Russell and Kayoko Takeda

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the cognitive models that have shaped the teaching of interpreters, including models that specifically address consecutive interpreting, and discusses the practice of consecutive interpreting, beginning with a historical overview and moving to contemporary use. We also argue for a review of how consecutive interpreting, cognitive models, note-taking and decision-making are taught in order to prepare interpreters for conference and non-conference interpreting.

Consecutive interpreting (CI) is defined as the process of interpreting after the speaker or signer has completed one or more ideas in the source language and then pauses while the interpreter transmits that information (Russell 2005). González et al. ([1991] 2012) states that when using CI in the court setting, the duration of the source language can be anywhere from a few seconds to several minutes. “Long consec” is a phrase used to describe consecutively interpreting a lengthy passage (over several minutes) or possibly an entire speech at a time, usually with the aid of notes, while “short consec” refers to consecutively interpreting a short passage, possibly a word to a few sentences, with or without the aid of notes.

Cognitive aspects

Models of interpreting have developed over the years as a way to conceptualize the ways in which interpreters perform their work. Pöchhacker (2004, and Chapter 4, this volume) provides an excellent review of the theoretical, methodological, and disciplinary perspectives that have shaped interpreting research and interpreting models. While Pöchhacker (2004) reports on models that reflect many levels of analysis within interpreting studies, we have chosen to examine here some of the cognitive and interactional models that have impacted both spoken and signed language interpretation and have particular relevance for CI.

Some of the earliest models from the 1970s focused on the cognitive processes involved in CI. Seleskovitch (1978) was one of the first to introduce a more cognitive based analysis of interpreting (consecutive as well as simultaneous), cognitive model of interpreting which focused on the interpreter’s understanding and expression of “sense” as opposed to linguistic transcoding. In the field of signed language interpreting specifically, Colonomos (1987) also
described three stages of cognitive processing, each with its own cognitive tasks. Her model focuses on some of the tasks associated with accessing short-term and long-term memory for knowledge, and making the target language switch based on linguistic and cultural knowledge, including awareness of discourse frames in both ASL (American Sign Language) and English, thus introducing communication norms into the discussion.

During this same period, Cokely (1992) also offered a sociolinguistic model of interpreting, based on a detailed breakdown of the mental processes that occur during linguistic analysis and reconstruction. His model highlights seven main processing stages, and many more sub-processes which reflect top-down processing, such as message reception, preliminary processing, short-term message retention, semantic intent realized, semantic equivalent determined, syntactic message formulation, and message production.

Each of the cognitive models mentioned above has made contributions to the field of interpreting by articulating some of the processes involved, thereby helping interpreters to find strategies to improve their work, and offering tools to interpreter educators for teaching interpreting. However, the models have also invited further debate about the complexity of interpreting, which has led to further research into communication processes and the ways in which interpreting affects communication among participants who do not share the same language. For example, in the late 1980s we saw an increase in the discussion of the nature of text and discourse in interpreted interactions (Pöchhacker, 2004). Pöchhacker’s (1992) own model of interpreted interaction brings attention to the “perspective” of the individuals in the event, moving us away from a sole focus on text and content. Alexieva (2002) emphasizes seven parameters that influence the interpreted event: distance vs. proximity between participants, equality/solidarity vs. non-equality/power, formal settings vs. informal setting dynamics, the shared or conflicting goals of participants, and cooperativeness/directness vs. non-cooperativeness/indirectness.

Some other dominant theories that have found a place in interpretation practices and in the education of interpreters include Vermeer’s ([1989] 2000) *skopos* theory of translational action and Gile’s ([1995] 2009) set of models referred to as the Effort Models in interpreting. As research in interpreting has become more established as a field of inquiry, it has led to increased recognition of interpreter-mediated interactions, in which the interpreter’s decisions influence all participants and potential outcomes, and to greater awareness of discourse-based interactions in which the interpreter is seen as an active third participant in a three-party conversation (Roy, 2000; Wadensjö, 1998). Wadensjö (1998) distinguishes between “interpreting as text” and “interpreting as activity”; two orientations that interpreters hold when they are working, and she introduces the phrase “interactionally oriented” (*ibid.*: 24) to describe interpreters who coordinate interpreting both at the textual level and at the level of situated activity within the interpreted event.

Napier (2002) stresses that interpreters must adopt a sociolinguistic and sociocultural approach to their work, in order to recognize the contextual factors that will influence each interpretation. Similarly, Wilcox and Shaffer (2005) argue that although the field of interpretation has moved away from viewing the interpreter as a passive participant, merely passing along information, to more dialogic and interactional models, the conduit view of our work often remains an unchallenged assumption about how human communication works (*ibid.*: 27).

Within any of these cognitive models of interpreting is an understanding that communication, whether direct or mediated through interpreters, requires all participants to actively work at constructing meaning based on evidence provided by speakers. Wilcox and Shaffer (*ibid.*) identify the crucial factors in this active process as the nature of language (especially semantics), production (how thought and meanings are expressed), and comprehension processes that shape the ways in which we understand what the other person means (*ibid.*: 27). Further, they suggest
that when interpreters acknowledge they are actively constructing meaning they can be then become more aware of their own influence on an interaction, thus challenging the notion of neutrality, which is so prevalent in the field of interpretation.

With so many models and orientations of studies in the field of interpreting, how might these models support the development of effective CI skills? The value of models to interpreting is that they offer guidance in understanding the nature of how communicators structure messages and how interpreters try to access and construct that meaning in order to recreate it in a second language. They also offer us insight into how interpreters can practice the cognitive sub-tasks of interpreting so as to develop the short- and long-term memory and analysis skills needed to produce accurate target texts. Shlesinger (2000) suggests that simultaneous interpreting (SI) is such a complex task that we may never fully understand all of the components of the process and how they interact, but that interpreting may actually be a combination of cognitive processes and proceduralized strategies (see Chapter 5 on simultaneous interpreting). We argue this is true for CI as well. It is also helpful for us to have models of interpreting as an activity in which interpreters focus on the participants’ understanding of various parts of the interaction and the progression of that interaction, drawing on the context that participants bring and the meaning that is created during the interaction (Wadensjö 1998).

Two models, one proposed by Daniel Gile ([1995] 2009) and a second offered by Debra Russell (2002a, 2005), have specific application to CI.

**Gile’s effort models in interpreting**

Gile ([1995] 2009) set out a series of models that are designed to explain the cognitive challenges of interpreting in order to highlight an interpreter’s available choices, and the strategies that could be employed in order to increase the likelihood of successful interpreting performance. Gile’s model has two basic principles: interpreting requires mental energy that is available in limited supply, and interpreting takes up almost all of this mental energy, sometimes requiring more than is available, at which times performance deteriorates (*ibid.*: 161). Further, Gile notes that some mental operations are non-automatic and require attention, which takes cognitive processing capacity from a limited available supply, while automatic operations do not. Gile’s model of consecutive interpretation ([1995] 2009) is a two-phase model, involving a listening phase and a reformulation phase.

The listening and analysis effort refers to all comprehension-oriented operations, from analysis of the sound waves carrying the speech to the interpreter’s ear, to identifying the linguistic elements of the language, to the final decisions made about the “meaning” of the utterance (Gile [1995] 2009: 162). Leeson (2005) suggests that the corresponding task for signed language interpreters is to “comprehend a visual-spatial language based on identification of the visually received linguistic messages, followed by the identification of signed lexical items and phrases co-occurring with non-manual cues, through to decisions regarding the meaning of these items in context” (*ibid.*: 54).

Comprehension is a non-automatic process for interpreters, as Wilcox and Shaffer (2005) remind us, and hence is subject to attention capacity restrictions and saturation.

Gile next introduces the production effort, where the interpreter creates notes to support her memory of the message. Note-taking techniques need to be developed in order to provide a consistent advantage for the interpreter by reducing memory load constraints.

Short-term memory effort recognizes the important role of short-term memory and long-term memory in interpretation. Gile posits that both of the cognitive operations that address short- and long-term memory occur continuously during interpreting and are non-automatic. Gile states, “In consecutive it is associated with the time between the moment it is written down
The reformulation phase of the model involves three efforts, where the interpreter does not have to share processing capacity between the tasks of listening, analysis and note-taking. The note-reading effort is the first, where interpreters require some processing capacity to decipher their own notes, which again stresses the need for them to practice note-taking and working from notes so that those processes are effective in supporting the interpretation. This stage draws on long-term memory effort, which allows the interpreter to retrieve information about the original utterance. Patrie (2004) explains that interpreters often rely on visual memory for this aspect of the task, by looking at the arrangement of their notes to represent aspects of the source message, or by accessing visual memory storage mechanisms to help them sequence the order of events in a speech. Patrie stresses this is especially applicable to signed language interpreters who receive a signed message via visual mechanisms.

The next effort of the second phase is the production effort, which relates to producing the message in the target language. (This is the second “production” in the consecutive model, with the first production being the creation of notes in the first phase of the model.) Unlike simultaneous interpretation, where comprehension and full production are not separated (see Chapter 5 on simultaneous interpretation), the interpreter delivering in a consecutive mode is spared short-term memory pressures and the demands associated with delivery of the message immediately in the target language. In this second phase the interpreter produces the target message, and monitors the output. It is at this stage that interpreters employ “problem solving” strategies, for example, in finding the most accurate word for a particular linguistic context, or determining the most effective syntactic structure. Leeson (2005) suggests that such problems are common not only among spoken language interpreters, but they are also significant for signed language interpreters. She identifies the fact that signed language interpreters must additionally deal with a shift in language modality (i.e., from spoken to signed discourse or vice versa), which in turn brings further production issues relative to the differences in how spoken and signed languages structure and maintain discourse (ibid.: 56).

Patrie (2004) emphasizes the value of drawing upon models such as Gile’s effort models, as they break down the subskills required by interpreters. When the subskills of CI become more routinized, the interpreter can then devote more attention to aspects of the interpreting process that cannot be routinized, such as attending to contextual clues and rendering accurate and effective meaning.

**Meaning-based model of interpreting**

The model developed in Russell (2000, 2002a, 2005) specifically identifies the need for the interpreter to assess and apply contextual factors impacting the interpretation by actively using background knowledge about language, culture, conventional ways of communication in both languages, and to determine whether to use consecutive or simultaneous interpreting within a given interaction. While the mode may be pre-determined in some settings, when working in one-to-one contexts or with small groups providing whispered spoken interpretation, this decision is often made on the basis of the discourse requirements. This model (shown in Figure 6.1) acknowledges differences in linguistic and cultural meanings between two languages, and also the need for meaning-based work, as the desired interpretation product is created throughout the interaction and with active co-construction of meaning wherein the interpreter is an active participant. The steps of the meaning-based interpreting model include:
1 Assess contextual factors and monitor the process

As the interpreter approaches the interpreting task, contextual factors need to be considered, but this activity does not stop prior to the task. Throughout the interaction, the interpreter constantly assesses contextual factors and their impact upon communication. Context helps the interpreter determine the speaker’s or signer’s particular meaning within the specific interpreted interaction. This includes assessing factors such as the relationship between the parties in the interaction, the formal and informal power structures represented, the similarities and differences in backgrounds and experiences of the participants, the emotional overlay of the interaction, and the impact of the interpreter’s presence on the way the speaker and signer construct their messages. In addition, throughout all phases of the interpreted interaction, the interpreter monitors the communication process because the participants are creating additional context and experience through their dialogue. At times, the interpreter finds herself surrounded by topics, specific lexicon and jargon, and descriptions of events that the participants have shared knowledge of, whereas the interpreter lacks that content and contextual information. While being the first step in the model, it importantly overlays each subsequent step represented.

2 Comprehend source language message

During this stage, the interpreter must draw upon skills related to linguistic and cultural awareness, as well as discourse analysis, in order to support comprehension of the original message. The interpreter draws upon her fluency in both languages in the following areas:

a. Syntactic knowledge;

b. Semantic knowledge;
3 Apply contextual and linguistic schemas and select simultaneous or consecutive interpreting

This stage involves the application of the interpreter’s on-going assessment of contextual factors influencing the interaction, such as linguistic competence, the experiential and cultural frames of the participants who are interacting, and their cross-cultural and cross-linguistic experience. At this stage the interpreter also determines whether to use consecutive or simultaneous interpreting for the message in order to support genuine communication for all participants and to maintain strategies that support successful interpretation. The decision to use CI is made based on the discourse and interaction demands, which can include the complexity and density of the information, the setting, working with a child as a consumer, the unfamiliarity of the information to the interpreter, and/or grave consequences of interpreter error.

4 Formulate equivalent/effective message

After processing the information (drawing on lexical, phrasal, sentential, and discourse knowledge) and applying cultural and linguistic frames in order to realize the goals of the speaker or signer, the interpreter then makes cultural and linguistic choices – planning, formulating, and reviewing the elements to be used to express an effective message in the target language. Elements of the target message may be silently rehearsed at this stage. Assessing contextual factors and monitoring the process continue to apply.

5 Produce target language interpretation

At this stage the interpreter produces the target message, based on the previous stages. Once again, at this step, the interpreter continues to assess contextual factors and monitors the process to ensure the effectiveness of the interpretation among the parties.

This model brings together the roles of context, linguistic and cultural schemas, and the decision-making processes that involve choosing consecutive or simultaneous interpreting. The Meaning-based Model presented above offers both the interpreter and the interpreter educator a window into the tasks to be accomplished when analyzing interpreted interactions. The process of interpreting is clearly very complex, but by identifying and practicing some of the tasks of
each stage, students learning to interpret can develop the linguistic and interactional skills necessary to perform the work, while recognizing their role as an active participant in the co-construction of meaning (practitioners also need to reinforce their awareness of this approach periodically).

Practice

Historical overview

Interpreting has facilitated communication across languages and cultures throughout the history of humanity. Presumably, what is now called consecutive interpreting and whisper interpreting in the simultaneous mode were the predominant forms carried out in spoken language before the invention of special equipment for SI and subsequent development of SI practice in the middle of the 20th century. In fact, CI for bilateral dialogues can be considered the prototypical act by an interpreter as a mediator of communication between parties who do not share a common language. This model of a bilingual person enabling communication between monolinguals must have existed in all instances of language contact, whether through trade, diplomacy, exploration, governance, colonization, or war (see Chapter 1 on the history of interpreting). Stone (2009) reports that for the deaf community there is a long tradition of family members interpreting so that deaf people can have access to mainstream institutional activities. (See Chapter 7 for more information on the history of sign language interpreting.)

Due to the ephemerality of interpreting, it is rather difficult for researchers to locate details of how interpreting was actually performed in spoken language before the invention of sound recording devices. Some studies, however, indicate that CI in diplomatic settings prior to the end of World War I was performed in a sentence-by-sentence manner (e.g. Delisle and Woodsworth 2012: 251; Gaiba 1998: 28; see Chapter 1 for more historical information).

It is generally agreed that the professionalization of conference interpreting as we know it today originated in the Paris Peace Conference in 1918, where English and French were spoken (e.g. Baigorri-Jalón 2004; Pöchhacker 2004). The CI performed then and in newly established organizations, such as the League of Nations and the International Labour Organization, had a distinct feature: interpreting a whole speech in length (or in long segments). One session of interpreting could be as long as an hour or more (e.g. Herbert 1978: 8; Gaiba 1998: 29). The main reason for this new mode of CI is said to be that speakers did not want their remarks to be interrupted by the interpreter for fear of losing their illocutionary force (Ito-Bergerot 2005). Also, it is said that the audience, especially one that understood the language used by the speaker, wanted to listen to speeches in their entirety instead of having them broken down into short segments (ibid.). In delivering the interpretation, interpreters generally relied on notes they took while listening to the source speech. They also had to have a good memory and analytical skills to process the information contained in a long speech. Good public speaking skills were important as well, since interpreters rendered their interpretation on the dais just like the source speakers. The visibility of interpreters made it easy for the audience to take notice of the special skills the interpreters exhibited. This period in the European context is called the Golden Age of CI (ibid.).

After the feasibility and efficiency of SI was demonstrated during the Nuremberg Trial (1945–1946), the United Nations started introducing SI. There was a brief period when consecutive interpreters resisted SI, claiming that it would be a parroting act and thus less accurate, and would make interpreters invisible in booths, degrading their job (Baigorri-Jalón 2004). However, such opposition was overcome and SI has spread across different regions very quickly,
replacing CI in most international organizations and conferences (see Chapters 5 and 11 for discussions of simultaneous interpreting and conference interpreting).

By contrast, signed language interpreters do not experience the same language overlap as spoken language interpreters, in that they work with two different language modalities, a spoken and a signed language. This fact has led to the predominant use of simultaneous interpreting, as no technology is needed support SI work. However, as research has emerged about CI and SI, there has been a re-examination of when and where CI can be and should be used.

**Contemporary settings**

While SI has overtaken CI mainly to save time in multilingual conference settings, CI may be employed if special equipment for SI, and/or interpreters who can handle SI, are either not available or too expensive for the clients. (Although whisper interpreting for one or a few persons in the simultaneous mode can be executed without equipment, SI in spoken languages for a larger audience cannot be performed effectively without equipment such as a transmission system, microphones, and headsets.)

There remain, however, several scenarios in which CI is the preferred mode in interpreter-mediated communication in both spoken and signed language interpreting. Since the interpreter is generally in close proximity to the speakers in CI settings, CI is more flexible than SI in terms of allowing the interpreter to communicate and clarify with participants, manage the dialogical discourse, and look at the physical conditions of the participants and their surroundings. Thus, CI is generally considered suitable when the number of participants is small and face-to-face dialogues predominate, as in doctor-patient sessions. The longer time needed for CI (relative to SI) can also work to the advantage of participants who want to “buy time” to think carefully about what to say, for example in high-level bilateral negotiations.

In addition, CI may achieve greater accuracy of interpretation, presumably because the interpreter can take more time to reformulate all the elements of the source speech, including tone and nuance. Since consecutive interpreters hear the entire utterance before delivering the interpretation, they know exactly what they are interpreting and are less likely to fall victim to misguided anticipation (which can happen more easily in SI). Consecutive interpreters can also clarify with the speaker if there is something unclear about the speech. In addition, it is easier for bilinguals who are present to notice interpreting errors, since both the source speech and the interpretation are exposed in CI. Corrections can be made on the spot during the pause between the interpretation and the next utterance by the speaker. Thus, CI may be considered more desirable in settings where sensitive issues are discussed or the verbatim records of interpretation are kept for evidence, such as in legal proceedings. In fact, CI is generally associated with legal, healthcare, and other community-based interpreting. (See Chapters 12–17 for further discussion of these settings).

Empirical studies comparing CI and SI in terms of accuracy and quality have shown mixed results so far. While Gile (2001) finds CI less accurate than SI in his exploratory experiment with English-French interpreting, Russell (2005) finds the contrary in her quasi-experimental study with signed language interpreting in courtroom events. Viezzi (2013: 383–4) argues that it cannot be generalized that CI is more accurate and reliable than SI as the quality of interpreting can be affected by the competence of the individual interpreter and various other factors.

In sum, CI is used in a wide variety of settings, both international and intra-societal. It can be observed today in diplomatic, political and business meetings, legal proceedings, doctor-patient communication, and various other face-to-face settings. Besides technical reasons, such as the unavailability of equipment, the preference of CI over SI may be attributed to the flexibility of
CI in handling dialogical communication, and the belief that CI is more suitable for achieving accurate and complete renditions in high-stakes events where the interpretation can become the record of the proceedings.

**Features and trends**

Although approaches to CI today vary depending on the purpose of a given communicative event, they may be roughly divided into two categories: CI for interactive, face-to-face communication between parties, and CI for monological, one-to-many communication with little interaction with the audience. In either case, the length of a segment which the interpreter interprets at a time varies between settings and even within a single discourse: it can be as short as a single word and as long as remarks lasting more than several minutes. As Viezzi (2013: 378) points out, CI for hour-long, uninterrupted speeches of the League of Nations is a thing of the past. For instance, in the CI used during the press conference of U.S. President Barack Obama and Chinese President Hu Jintao in 2010, the shortest remark by any speaker was two seconds, and the longest was two minutes. Takeda (2011) reports that in ten online video samples of CI in actual settings (not for practice) she surveyed, covering diverse language combinations, topics and settings, the average length of an utterance interpreted consecutively at a time was 20 seconds and the longest was two minutes and 12 seconds. Having been exposed to the immediacy of SI, audiences seem to be impatient with long waits during remarks in a language they do not understand, perhaps leading to shorter CI utterances.

As for the directionality of interpreting, in contrast with SI in which interpreters often work unidirectionally (usually into their A language or mother tongue), consecutive interpreters predominantly work in both directions between the two languages, especially in face-to-face dialogues. A survey conducted by Takeda (2011) using graduates of an interpreting program indicates that about 80% of their CI practice is bidirectional. In a study conducted with 1995 North American signed language interpreters working in legal contexts, Roberson, Russell and Shaw (2012) found that interpreters reported using CI across a range of legal contexts, from child protection, lawyer-client meetings, police interviews, and courtroom testimony, and that all of their work involved using both American Sign Language and spoken English, emphasizing the bidirectional nature of their work. Exceptions are settings, such as state-to-state negotiations, where both sides bring their own interpreters and they interpret only from the language of their own side to the language of the other side.

One of the main features of CI in face-to-face dialogical interactions is the interpreter’s active role as a co-constructor of discourse in interpreted communication. A number of empirical studies (e.g. Wadensjö 1998; Roy 2000) have reported on interpreters managing speakers’ turns and intervening to speak for themselves in order to resolve confusion and problems that may arise from intercultural and interlingual issues. As described above, the interpreter’s close proximity to the participants of a given communicative event enables her to directly communicate with them at will, sometimes raising ethical issues. For instance, the issue of interpreters acting as advocates for the less powerful (such as patients, deaf students, and defendants) has been debated against the backdrop of the canon of neutrality put forth in most codes of ethics for interpreters (see Chapter 16, for example, on mental health interpretation, and Chapter 20 on ethics).

Lastly, the recent use of technology-assisted CI should be noted here. In what Hamidi and Pöchhacker (2007) call the “simultaneous-consecutive (sim-consec)” mode of interpreting, the interpreter records the source speech with a portable recording device and simultaneously interprets its quick replay. Since the interpreter starts delivering the target language rendition after the speaker has stopped speaking, it is a form of CI procedurally. But the rendition itself is
SI, since delivery takes place as the interpreter listens to the replayed speech. The purported advantages of sim–consec include the following: the interpreter can listen to the source speech twice, which may result in a higher level of comprehension and accuracy in interpretation; the interpretation is almost the same length as the source speech, as it is rendered simultaneously; and there is no need for intensive note-taking, benefiting those who struggle with that skill. On the other hand, the extra effort to operate the recorder and the possibility of recorder failure are considered drawbacks of sim–consec.

Another example of technology-assisted CI is the use of a real-time transcription system in legal settings (see Chapter 10 on transcription). With this arrangement, everything said in the language of the court (English in the U.S. courts, for example) is recorded and transcribed by the court reporter, and its transcription is available in real time on a computer screen in front of the interpreter. As long as the language of the court is spoken and its real-time transcription is accurate, the interpreter’s effort can be reduced in terms of note-taking and memorization, since she can rely on the transcription of the source speech on the screen. The interpreter can engage in sight translation from the screen (see Chapter 9 on sight translation), instead of using memory and notes. Since the interpreter’s renditions into the language of the court also appear on the screen in real time, it is possible for the interpreter to monitor her own interpretation and make self-corrections, if necessary. One drawback may be that the quality of the real-time transcription depends on the competence of the court reporter, and there is always the possibility of errors in the transcriptions. Thus, some interpreters still take notes and look at the screen only to double-check numbers, proper nouns, etc.

**Note-taking**

Although CI can be performed with or without notes, note-taking has been one of the primary topics in the teaching of and research on CI, especially in the context of so-called “long consec”, which is sometimes called “classic consec” or even “true consec” by some practitioners. The degree to which interpreters resort to note-taking in CI may depend on several factors, such as the length of the source utterance to be interpreted at a time, the physical constraints of where the interpreter is situated, and the interpreter’s memory. It is often said that there is no universal approach to note-taking (Stern 2011), and different interpreters use different note-taking methods.

Although each interpreter may ultimately develop her own note-taking system, practitioners and teachers of interpreting have published note-taking techniques for CI. The first such publication was a booklet on principles of note-taking and symbols written by Rozan (1956), who was a conference interpreter teaching at University of Geneva. The seven principles Rozan presented were: (1) note the idea rather than the word; (2) abbreviate long words; (3) show links between ideas (logical links); (4) indicate negation; (5) add emphasis (for adverbs such as “very” and “extremely”); (6) take notes vertically (from top to bottom); and (7) shift from left to right (indenting). In general, most or all of these techniques seem to be practiced by professional interpreters, regardless of the language combinations (Pöchhacker 2011), and are recommended by others as well (e.g. Jones 2002; Gillies 2005). The key is that the notes should be concise and easily trigger recall during delivery (Stern, 2011). Note-taking should not be a hindrance to the “effort for listening and analysis” (Gile 1995 2009). Above all, as Viezzi (2013: 380) suggests, too much emphasis on note-taking may not be wise, as note-taking is just a means, and not the end, of CI. This is supported by Russell (2000, 2002a), who found that interpreters who used ineffective interpreting strategies in court unnecessarily increased the time between listening and producing the interpretation, and often had to ask for utterances to be repeated despite having the notes available.
Other note-taking techniques are often observed in the professional practice of interpreting. For instance, when notes for one idea are completed and progress to another idea, a horizontal line is drawn to separate the ideas from each other. Also, it is considered important to note numbers, proper names, technical terms, and words carefully chosen by the speaker, which seems to contradict Rozan’s suggestion to note the idea rather than the word. The use of symbols is often encouraged, since they are generally concise and represent “ideas”. In addition to Rozan’s symbol list (1956), there are other publications which give elaborate symbol systems in Russian (Min’iar-Beloruchev 1969) and German (Matyssek 1989). All the proposed symbols are not necessarily universal, as what a given symbol represents may differ depending on cultural context. It may be up to individual interpreters to come up with symbols that make sense to them and learn to use those symbols consistently.

Signed language interpreters have frequently relied on techniques used in creating mind maps in order to support their interpretations and translations (see Ford 1988), building on visual memory techniques and combining the maps with some written words and symbols. However, interpreters working to and from signed languages, for example, from British Sign Language to American Sign Language in a conference setting, will likely have little use for note-taking. Patrie (2004) explains that if the signed language interpreter is working from a spoken to a signed language, it is physically possible for an interpreter to take notes and refer to the notes when rendering the consecutive interpretation, whereas it is less common when working from a signed to a spoken language due to the physical constraint of simultaneously watching the signed message and taking notes. Ultimately, each interpreter will develop her own strategies to support effective consecutive interpreting.

As for the choice of language in note-taking, different approaches have been suggested by interpreting practitioners and researchers. The use of the target language forces interpreters to translate as they take notes, which should reduce the effort required during the production stage. In contrast, the use of the source language may require less effort with note-taking, but more effort during the production stage. Use of the A language or a more “economical” language as the source or target language may also contribute to efficient and consistent note-taking. Empirical studies on language preferences in note-taking indicate mixed results. In studying the preferred language(s) used in note-taking by interpreters, Dam (2004) found the use of the A language and Szabo (2006) found the use of English (over Hungarian) to be more prevalent. These results suggest the diverse and ultimately personal nature of note-taking methods.

**CI in interpreter education**

*The role of CI in conference interpreter training*

In the context of conference interpreter training in higher education, CI usually means “long consec” with systematic note-taking and is taught accordingly, with a focus on monological communication. SI has replaced CI in many international conferences, and even when CI is used, this mode of CI (“long consec”) is rarely practiced in the real world. However, the use of long CI in training is considered effective in building a foundation for students preparing for SI training (e.g., Seleskovitch and Lederer 1995; Gile 2005). Exercises in CI foster students’ analytical listening and content-based interpreting, rather than the “transcoding” that might happen if SI were introduced before acquiring the skills for CI (Gile 2005: 133). CI is also often used to screen candidates for SI study (i.e., passing CI tests is a prerequisite for SI training).

There is a belief that if students are trained in long CI, they will be prepared to deal with speeches of any length (Jones 2002). Jones (ibid: 5) argues that if interpreters can cope with a
five-minute speech in CI, they should be able to handle any length of speech. Thus, according to this school of thought, training exercises in CI should mainly focus on interpreting monological speeches of around five minutes or longer (for instance, Seleskovitch and Lederer 1995: 104 suggest four to seven minutes), with separate unidirectional classes usually taught by a native speaker of the target language. In this practice, note-taking is an essential part of the exercises. Public speaking skills are also emphasized. Another belief associated with using CI in conference interpreter training is that renditions by the interpreter should not be longer than the source utterances. Jones (2002: 35), for instance, suggests that the duration of a rendition should be about two-thirds to three-quarters of the speaker’s delivery time, which can be achieved by eliminating hesitations and unnecessary repetitions in the source speech. With the emphasis on long speeches, note-taking, public speaking, and “efficient” renditions, these methods of teaching CI in conference interpreter training seem to be greatly influenced by the tradition of CI practice from the post-WWI era in Europe, and may not prepare students for how CI is practiced currently and in other parts of the world. In Japan, for example, conference interpreters are trained in “short consec”, reflecting the market needs for Japanese interpreters.

The role of CI in interpreter training for non-conference settings

In training for legal and healthcare interpreters in spoken languages, CI is taught on the basis of how it is practiced in the real world. Since dialogical CI is the predominant mode in the actual practice of legal and healthcare interpreting, realistic exchanges in courtroom and hospital settings are often used for exercises. In short-term programs, however, the time spent acquiring basic skills (analytical listening, note-taking, etc.) may be limited, as instruction on domain-specific knowledge, terminology and professional ethics is often prioritized in training public service interpreters (e.g. Ertl and Pöllabauer 2010).

In some countries, such as the United States and Australia, where interpreter certification exams exist, training programs are generally designed to prepare students for those exams. The exams for CI in court and healthcare interpreter certification are usually based on dialogical scenarios such as a prosecutor examining a defendant or a doctor asking a patient about symptoms. The length of the utterances to be interpreted varies, but tends to be short: from one word to a few sentences (e.g. National Center for State Courts 2011; National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters 2013). For the professional interpreting category, NAATI (the national standard and accreditation body for translators and interpreters in Australia) includes two types of CI in its exams: CI for dialogues and CI for unidirectional passages. The utterance to be interpreted does not normally exceed 60 words in dialogue interpreting; and the length of a passage to interpret at a time is about 130–170 words in monologue interpreting (NAATI 2013). If the recommendation of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) regarding speech speed (100 words per minute in English) was applied, the longest segment to interpret at a time in the NAATI tests for CI would be less than two minutes, which is probably a reflection of the actual practice in the market.

In the area of signed language interpreter training, Russell (2000b) conducted a pilot study of 15 interpreter education programs in the United States and Canada. The purpose of the study was to examine the ways in which CI is taught in programs, and the perceptions of educators about the use of CI. This was followed by interviews of fifteen interpreters who had graduated from interpreter programs during 2000 and 2002. The results showed that ten out of the 15 programs emphasize the need for students to gain a solid understanding of the cognitive processes needed for effective interpreting by acquiring text analysis skills and then use these to begin consecutive interpreting practice. After CI has been mastered, the students progress to simultaneous work.
By comparison, other programs choose to teach cognitive models and CI through an informational approach, providing theory but little time for acquiring the necessary foundational skills. The approach used and the length of time spent teaching CI varies among programs, from a few weeks within a semester, to one or two full semesters, to three semesters.

Russell, Shaw, and Malcolm (2010) describe a progression of skill development used in their teaching that incorporates discourse analysis, translation skills, consecutive and then simultaneous interpreting skills, with the goal of helping students to make effective discourse and interactional decisions about how to blend both simultaneous and consecutive interpreting within a given interaction. This approach is consistent with the work of Cokely (2005), who argued for curriculum changes in interpreter programs that would ensure that all interpreting skill classes would include aspects of translation, consecutive interpreting, and simultaneous interpreting, with the amount of time and focus dependent on the stage of learning. These approaches ultimately address the problem identified in Russell (2002b), which suggests that some educators and recent graduates of interpreter education programs see consecutive interpreting only as a stepping stone in the development of SI, not as a mode to be used throughout an interpreter’s career. Such preparation offers students insight into the variety of opportunities and demands that may be made of them in the market.

Future directions in CI training

As discussed above, CI is an integral part of interpreter training for both practical and pedagogical reasons. Notwithstanding the great diversity within each category, CI training for conference interpreters generally focuses on monological, long consec as a preparatory stage for SI, while CI training for non-conference settings aims to reflect professional environment through dialogic scenario-based exercises. Although financial and human resources may be limiting factors, each training approach would benefit from adopting certain practices of the other. Without compelling theoretical grounding or empirical evidence to support the belief that students trained in monological, long CI will be able to handle any type of CI, teachers of conference interpreting should be encouraged to pay more attention to the diverse range of CI their students may engage in after graduation. It would be worthwhile to consider the benefits of incorporating in conference interpreter training shorter, more precise (not condensed) CI that requires agility and flexibility in handling bidirectional interpreting and managing the interactive aspects of dialogue settings.

On the other hand, more foundational exercises for basic CI skills may be needed for training interpreters in non-conference settings. Jacobsen (2012) discusses the issues of accuracy and verbatim records with the use of whisper interpreting in the Danish courtroom. The avoidance of CI by interpreters derives from their reluctance to take notes, which is linked to a lack of formal training in CI with note-taking. Exercises in systematic note-taking should also benefit interpreters who primarily work in settings where short CI prevails.

Finally, educators and students have opportunities to examine ways to integrate research and practice, resulting in authentic classroom learning. There is a need to continue exploring the role of cognitive models of interpreting and of CI as part of the crucial skill set that interpreters require in order to work in a variety of settings, at all stages of their career.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the nature and process of CI by examining some of the cognitive models of CI. Such models are useful for both spoken and signed language interpreting, especially when examining what defines successful practices regarding the relationship between processing
time and the ability of the interpreter to realize and co-construct meaning based on the interaction and context that all participants bring to the communication event.

This chapter has also provided a historical overview of CI, its current practice in various settings, featuring note-taking and other attributes, and recent trends in the practice CI, driven by technology and expectations of the users of CI services. Lastly, the role of CI training in interpreter education for conference and non-conference settings was discussed, along with issues and challenges in meeting the needs and requirements of CI in the real world. Drawing on literature from spoken and signed language interpreting, we suggest that there is ample evidence upon which to create solid training opportunities for interpreters in the use of CI, including the use of cognitive models, note-taking strategies, decision-making schemas, and problem solving strategies, supporting by a solid foundation of text and discourse analysis skills.

**Further reading**


An excellent overview of the task of interpreting and the theories that support effective interpretation.


A practical guide to how consecutive interpreting with systematic note-taking is performed in conference settings.


A seminal study that demonstrated the effectiveness of consecutive interpreting with legal discourse and the importance of discourse events shaping the decision to use consecutive or simultaneous interpreting.


A description of teaching approaches that lead to the use of consecutive and simultaneous interpreting in dialogic events.


A seminal study that demonstrated interpreting as both a text-based act and an interaction event.

**References**


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SIGNED LANGUAGE INTERPRETING

Karen Bontempo

Introduction

In the broader field of interpreting studies, the discipline of signed language interpreting can no longer be regarded as being in its infancy. A rapidly evolving field, recognition of the work of signed language interpreters, and indeed the status of the signed languages of deaf people, are still emerging in some parts of the world, while in other regions the field has matured considerably, with significant gains made over the past 20 years in particular. The increased professionalization of signed language interpreters, the innovative scholarly work being undertaken in the field, and the introduction of higher education teaching and learning opportunities for signed language interpreters have changed both practice and pedagogy noticeably in recent decades.

This chapter will present a brief overview of signed languages and the Deaf community in order to establish a social context for the history and evolution of signed language interpreting. The application of signed language interpreting in different settings will be outlined, the cognitive and physical demands of working in different language modalities will be highlighted, education and training issues will be explored, and research with practical implications for signed language interpreting pedagogy and practice will be addressed in this chapter. The steps taken towards the professionalization of the field and relevant trends in recent years will be described, and recommendations will be made for the future.

Definition of key terms

Signed languages: Signed languages are visual-gestural languages. Signed languages evolve naturally in Deaf communities, and signers use conventional and mutually agreed-upon symbols (that is, signs) to communicate with each other. Signed languages have their own grammar and lexicon, not based on the spoken language of the country or region where the community is located. Signed languages are not universal. They are real languages, with a complete set of linguistic structures, complex and highly nuanced, and are as sophisticated as natural spoken languages.

Signed language interpreting: Signed language interpreting is the facilitation of communication between parties who do not share the same language. Frequently the interpretation occurs between signed and spoken language users (e.g. deaf and hearing people); however, at times
signed language interpreters will also work between different signed languages, for example, interpreting from Auslan (Australian Sign Language) to ASL (American Sign Language), or trilingually between two spoken languages and a signed language (e.g. between English, Maori, and NZSL – New Zealand Sign Language). Signed language interpreters are typically hearing, although deaf interpreters are becoming increasingly common in some countries, often specializing in working between signed language pairs and bringing an innate understanding of signed languages and of Deaf culture to the work, as deaf people themselves.

Bimodal: Signed language interpreters work bimodally in that they typically operate between a signed language (using a visual-gestural modality) and a spoken language (using an aural-oral modality). Spoken language interpreters, on the other hand, operate unimodally, whereby both working languages are perceived by the same sensory system (audition).

Deaf/deaf: In referring to deaf people who belong to a linguistic and cultural minority known as the Deaf community, the ‘D’ may be capitalized in reference to the individual or the group in order to accord respect and deference, e.g. Deaf people. This is similar to being referred to as Aboriginal people, or members of the Macedonian community living in Australia. When referring simply to audiological status, i.e. a person with a hearing loss in general, the lower case ‘d’ as in ‘deaf’ is the more common usage and will be applied in this chapter.

Signed language acronyms: National and regional signed languages are commonly referred to in the form of acronyms, for example: DGS is Deutsche Gebärdensprache (German Sign Language); BSL is British Sign Language; LSF is Langue de Signes Française (French Sign Language), and so on.

Historical perspectives

Social and historical aspects of the Deaf community

In order to provide a context for the work of signed language interpreters and to properly situate this chapter, an overview of the pertinent social and historical issues relevant to the Deaf community and the use of signed language is required. The practice of signed language interpreting in one form or another has probably existed for as long as there have been Deaf communities around the world, whenever there has been a need for interaction and exchange with non-signing people. Natural signed languages arise whenever two or more deaf people come into contact with each other and meet regularly (Sandler and Lillo-Martin 2006), and references to the use of natural signed languages in society by deaf people have been attributed to both Plato and Socrates (Bauman 2008). A case in point where the development and maturation of a natural signed language has been witnessed is in Nicaragua, where Idioma de Señas de Nicaragua (ISN), or Nicaraguan Sign Language, spontaneously developed when deaf children were brought together for the first time in a central location for schooling purposes after the Sandinista revolution in 1979. Kegl (2002) and Senghas (2003) were able to carefully document the emergence of ISN during the 1980s – a remarkable study of spontaneous language generation by children upon coming together.

A barrier faced by Deaf communities in capturing and recording their language and history in the past has been that signed languages have no written orthography, not unlike a number of indigenous languages. Linguists have recently developed ‘sign writing’ or ‘gloss’ systems to be able to record and document signs, but signed languages have no written form in the traditionally understood sense of a writing system. This means that the process of collecting the history of the use of signed language, documenting the development and history of Deaf communities, and recording the evolution of signed language interpreting has been fraught until relatively
recent times. With the invention of film (Krentz 2006), and with improved education opportunities in Deaf communities, signed language data can now be captured and recorded, and research can be conducted on signed languages and on signed language interpreting.

Some official records, documented mostly by hearing people, do confirm the use of signed languages and interpreters dating back many years. Historical reference to signed language tends to be linked with the establishment of deaf education systems (Stone 2010) in Europe in the 16th through the 18th centuries, and the US in the 19th century, with a few exceptions. For example, Stone and Woll’s (2008) investigation of the historical records of the Old Bailey central criminal court in London, England, found clear reference to the first use of a signed language interpreter in that court in 1771. In 1787, a precedent to use a signed language interpreter was ‘formally established that if the courts were convinced that a deaf person could understand the proceedings’, then it would ‘agree to try that person in the normal way’ (Colin and Morris 1996: 93), meaning testimony could be given and a person tried via a signed language interpreter (Stone and Woll 2008: 232).

Stone (2010) notes that the first form of signed language interpreter examination in the UK can be documented back to 1928, whereby language facility and interpreting skills were assessed as part of a qualification to work in a welfare service role with deaf people. Other countries do not have formal interpreting assessment procedures or systems that date back quite that far, and indeed the actual formal signed language interpreter accreditation system of the UK, separate from the assessment of skill within a welfare worker role, came much later. The US is widely acknowledged for pioneering signed language research and the formal development of signed language interpreter education and training opportunities. The 1960s saw a flurry of activity in this regard, with the first sign linguistics research credited to William Stokoe with a publication in 1960 and the establishment of the signed language interpreters association in the US in 1964 (Ball 2007). Interpreting examinations followed a few years later; the UK and Europe followed suit in the 1970s, and Australia in the 1980s (Johnston and Schembri 2007; Napier et al. 2010).

In the period between 1980 and 1990, many civil and political events around the world further changed the Deaf community and resulted in the increasing professionalization of signed language interpreting. An important example drawn from the US is the ‘Deaf President Now’ (DPN) movement. In March 1988, deaf student activism drew the attention of the world’s media to Gallaudet University in Washington DC. Authorized by Congress to confer degrees in 1864 in a bill signed by then President Abraham Lincoln, it is the only liberal arts university for deaf people in the world. However, in the 124 years from 1864 to 1988, the university had never had a deaf president. A highly publicized student movement in 1988 resulted in the appointment of a deaf president and a deaf majority on the Board of Directors (Jankowski 1997).

The visibility in the media of Gallaudet University and the civil action by deaf students during the DPN movement raised the profile of signed language, signed language interpreters, and of deaf people, not only in the US but around the world. Many have likened the protest and affiliated activism to the civil rights actions taken by other oppressed groups, and the DPN movement is seen as a watershed in Deaf history in terms of raising awareness and acknowledging the status and abilities of deaf people, as well as bringing attention to signed language and signed language interpreters (Shapiro 1994). The DPN is recognized for bringing about legislative and social change in the US, including the Americans with Disabilities Act, as well as acts regarding tele-communications access and television captioning bills. It led to an unquantifiable sense of pride and achievement in the Deaf community, potentially breaking down barriers and encouraging deaf people to take up further studies and to enter occupations previously not considered possible for deaf people. This civil rights activity also had an immeasurable impact on signed language
interpreting, with increased enrollment of second language learners in college signed language classes. Another consequence of the new disability anti-discrimination legislation was greater opportunities for interpreters to work with deaf professionals in wider government and community settings.

This increased interest in signed language among second language learners has impacted the interpreting field. Many of the early signed language interpreters were hearing members of the Deaf community and often native signers themselves (such as the hearing children of deaf parents). This is very uncommon today, with native signers comprising a very small percentage of the signed language interpreter workforce. The vast majority of practitioners in the signed language interpreting profession today are non-native users of signed language (Bontempo, Napier, Hayes and Brashear 2014; Napier et al. 2010). Cokely (2005) expresses concern about the increased social distance between non-native users of a signed language and the Deaf community, noting that many non-native signed language interpreters do not associate with the Deaf community and find it difficult to assimilate cultural norms and to become truly fluent in signed language, affecting their competence and performance as interpreters.

Most of the work of signed language interpreters is from a spoken language to a signed language, meaning signed language interpreters more commonly interpret into their “B” language, rather than working into their native language (refer to Chapter 5 on simultaneous interpreting and Chapter 11 on conference interpreting for discussion of spoken language interpreter directionality). Therefore, bimodal interpreters and unimodal interpreters do not share the same language translation asymmetry (Nicodemus and Emmorey 2013). One of the main reasons for this imbalance in directionality relates to the historically disempowered status of the Deaf community. Society often views deaf people as disabled. This pathological view of deafness sees deaf people in need of remediation – as people experiencing a loss or deficiency. The sociological perspective of deafness subscribed to by the Deaf community and their allies considers deaf people to be members of a linguistic and cultural minority – signed language users operating in a wider spoken language majority society (this was the certainly the philosophy behind the civil rights action of the DPN movement). Since the broader medical view of deaf people as ‘disabled’ has prevailed for many years, barriers to education and employment have existed for deaf people, and continue to do so today, particularly in developing countries. This means deaf people may have limited access to signed language interpreters in order to access government services, teaching and learning opportunities and so on.

The environment is changing for signed languages and for deaf people, however. More countries in the world are legally recognizing their national signed language in the constitution or in other government policies and laws. Many countries in the world have become signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, with 137 national governments having ratified the convention (Allen 2013). As the status of signed languages become recognized and Deaf communities around the world become increasingly empowered, the services of signed language interpreters become even more highly valued. Signed language interpreters play a key role in enabling access to information and in equalizing the playing field for deaf people when engaging with hearing people in wider society. The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) and the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) have entered into a joint agreement, and are involved in a number of community development projects in different developing countries. The goal of these projects is to assist and support deaf people in building capacity in their local Deaf communities, and in running interpreter training to develop the skills of local hearing allies who can play a role in working with the new Deaf Associations that are formed. While such an alliance seems logical, the relationship between deaf people and interpreters has not always been an easy one in the past.
The evolution of sign language interpreting

The field of signed language interpreting as we know it today has its roots in the Deaf community and in the advent of increasingly formalized service provision in Deaf Societies, Centres, Clubs, or Associations around the world. Deaf Societies, or similar charitable institutions initially established to address the social and welfare needs of deaf people, sprang up around the world around 100–150 years ago in many countries, in response to a call from the Deaf community to formalize a meeting place for deaf people (Bontempo and Hodgetts 2002; Napier et al. 2010). Often these institutions had a religious focus in the early days, with religious instruction and Bible study held regularly in the first halls and clubrooms of deaf people. Over time, hearing people tended to take over the running of these clubs and gatherings, the organizations became more structured and took on other welfare functions, and the clubrooms became formal organizations responsible for providing services to deaf people.

One of the services provided, even in the early days, was interpretation. Initially this was often provided on an informal basis by the hearing children of deaf adults (known as ‘codas’ (Bishop and Hicks 2008)), teachers of the deaf, ministers or members of the clergy, and other relatives and friends. Oftentimes suitably skilled hearing people were recruited or selected by respected members of the Deaf community to be nurtured and developed as interpreters. Those with community acceptance would take on the typically voluntary role of interpreting at meetings, community events and gatherings, and in any interactions with government. Deaf people were effectively gatekeepers, deciding who could be trusted and who had the appropriate skills to function in the role of interpreter in their local community (Lee 2010).

With the inception of Deaf Societies, paid ‘welfare workers’ employed by these organizations started to take on the role of interpreting in the wider hearing community at meetings, appointments and so on, and the need for people drawn from the Deaf community to voluntarily offer their services decreased. The efforts of some of these welfare workers have been criticized in recent years, with the benefit of historical hindsight. Welfare workers often did not ‘just’ interpret, but would also advocate, negotiate, advise, guide, decide, and so on. Omissions and additions in the interpretation were apparently frequent, creating an uneasy relationship between deaf people and welfare workers/pseudo-interpreters in some settings. Nevertheless, these workers were the first paid professional interpreters in most Deaf communities around the world. Over time, the need to distinguish between the welfare/community worker and the interpreter became more apparent, and eventually these jobs were split, with Departments of Interpreting being set up in many Deaf Societies and Deaf organizations. Training became available, and the face of interpreting in the Deaf community began to change considerably.

With the shift towards professional interpreting, signed language interpreters in many ways modelled their work practices on the existing literature and knowledge regarding spoken language interpreters. At that time, much of the information available pertained to conference interpreting. Although of some merit, generally speaking the transfer of these models and working practices were not a good fit for the work of signed language interpreters, who probably have more in common with interpreters of indigenous languages and languages of limited diffusion (Slatyer 2006) than with those in well-established languages with hundreds of years of a written orthography. This meant that the first formal interpreters in the Deaf community after moving away from the ‘welfare’ model were very mechanistic, conduit-style interpreters who operated as though they were removed from the setting and the people, and as if they were in an invisible conference booth. There was no recognition of the fact that the interpreter was present in the space, nor any acknowledgement of the influence the interpreter brought to bear in the setting, or how the interpreter impacted the dynamic of a dialogic interaction as a co-constructor of
meaning between a medical practitioner and a patient, for example. This led to the first professional signed language interpreters often being perceived as aloof and cold, and many older deaf people in particular lamented the loss of the old welfare worker/interpreter model.

Over time, as signed language interpreters began to find their way, the extreme pendulum swing from welfare worker to conduit model has settled back in the middle somewhere in the last 15 years or so, with interpreters now considered bilingual, bicultural allies of the Deaf community. However, a new challenge faces the Deaf community now, with so many non-native signing interpreters coming to the community who have little or no relationship with deaf people, as described previously. The majority of signed language interpreters today undertake courses of study in signed language and in interpreting at colleges and universities and are not ‘raised’ by, or drawn from, the Deaf community. The gate-keeping role the Deaf community once played is not available in the way it once was (Lee 2010). However, deaf people can still conduct informal screening of interpreting programme graduates upon entry to the workforce, and if found wanting, poorly skilled practitioners can be excluded from practice. Deaf people simply do not request their services or they decline to work with a deficient interpreter, sending a clear signal to interpreting service agencies that this interpreter is not fit for purpose.

The move towards professionalization of signed language interpreters is occurring at a rapid speed today. The impact of legislation and social change has shifted the landscape, and the increased opportunities for deaf people have changed the nature of the profession. It has been suggested, however, that with such rapid growth and change, the signed language interpreting field has entered a state of market disorder (Witter-Merithew and Johnson 2004). Demand is outstripping supply so fast that it is leading to inappropriate practice in the field, such as inadequately skilled practitioners gaining regular employment, often interpreting for deaf children in schools. Because of the erosion of hard-fought standards and the lack of a solid foundation as a profession, the field does not have the necessary ‘teeth’ to censure poor practice, to control admission to the profession, or to dictate employment standards, and for this reason there is a risk of being relegated to the status of a semi-profession (Bontempo 2013). The profession has not been able to keep pace with this upwards trajectory of growth. Monikowski (2013) argues there is little likelihood of this situation improving until more is expected in terms of education standards for practitioners and minimum scholarly requirements of interpreter educators.

**Current context**

**Education and training issues**

The picture regarding the education and training of signed language interpreters varies considerably around the world, from no training being available at all in some countries, to ad hoc short courses of a matter of weeks, to college-level courses of 1–2 years duration in some nations, to full-time undergraduate and postgraduate degree programs in universities in several countries (Napier 2009). In addition to the variability in training opportunities, not all countries have standard requirements for practice, certification bodies, or professional associations for signed language interpreters. In many countries the working conditions are not regulated, and signed language interpreters might work in exchange for a meal or travel reimbursement, while other countries have highly regulated sectors. Specified agreements may be in place in some countries addressing duration of assignment, pay scales, occupational health and safety guidelines, codes of ethics, and even regulations around team interpreting, such as working in pairs at long or complex jobs, and alternating between primary and support roles during the assignment to ensure interpreter fatigue does not cause message decay.
Thus, the professionalization of the field is highly variable and in a state of flux around the world. Joint projects between the WFD and the WASLI have led to an increase in interpreter training opportunities and the development of assessment protocols in a number of developing countries in recent years, and such collaborations have had a positive impact on all countries and individuals involved.

Such developments are important in the context of the United Nations Convention on the Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCHRPD), whereby the right for deaf people to access professional quality signed language interpreting services has been enshrined in international policy and ratified by the governments of many countries. The progress and professionalization of the signed language interpreting field can only be driven by education, training and research. Therefore, to achieve the goal of the UNCHRPD, opportunities for WFD and WASLI to influence teaching and learning programs for interpreters in developing countries are critical, as is the importance of access to quality education programs and adherence to professional standards in developed countries.

Significant change has occurred in recent years as the profession has moved from primarily a community-based interpreting industry with little academic foundation, to one that is increasingly embracing higher standards in training, as well as a search for knowledge, research, and information to support interpreting practice and pedagogy. Empirical research is being increasingly embraced in the field, and the infusion of evidence-based research findings into pedagogical practice is on the increase. This is quite a change from early approaches to teaching signed language interpreters, which was based largely on the intuition and experience of expert interpreters, in the absence of research findings specific to signed language interpreting pedagogy and practice.

**Research developments**

A growing body of scholarly research into signed language interpreting is being fed into interpreter education programs today. Indeed, the contribution made by signed language interpreting scholars in the past 20–25 years has been significant despite the relative youth of the field. A number of scholars are leading the research drive internationally in many ways, conducting ground-breaking work. Signed language interpreter researchers today have much to offer the spoken language interpreting sector, given that much of the signed language interpreting research that has been conducted in the field has been written for a broader translation and interpreting readership. Many signed language interpreting researchers are exploring the work of spoken language interpreting scholars and finding parallels, replicating studies previously conducted with spoken language interpreting students, and devising collaborative international studies which allow the two fields to intersect on common issues, such as interpreter programme admission testing and disposition for interpreting (Shaw and Hughes 2006; Shaw et al. 2004; Bontempo et al. 2014).

Roy’s (1992, 1996, 2000) seminal work on signed language interpreted discourse and Metzger’s (1999) foray into analysing the role of the signed language interpreter in interactive discourse, turn taking management and the dynamics of an interpreted event were critical contributions to the field. Napier has been a prolific scholar in the field over the past 15 years and is arguably the leading signed language researcher in the world at present. Her doctoral work on conscious strategic omissions and a new taxonomy for analysing interpretations was published as a book (2002a); she collaborated with colleagues in the production of a textbook that is now used in several interpreting programs around the world (Napier et al. 2010); and she has published extensively in prestigious, peer-reviewed academic publications about signed language interpreter

Winston has led the way with her work on educational interpreting (2004), producing the first edited volume of research on educational interpreting, which exposed the practice as flawed. Winston has also been a leading scholar in developing the domains and competencies necessary for teaching signed language interpreters and developing curricula for this purpose (2005). She has also conducted research into mentoring and teaching discourse (Winston and Monikowski 2000), as well as source text selection for assessment purposes (Winston and Swabey 2011). Russell’s (2002, 2005) work on consecutive interpreting and its application in the signed language interpreting sector, and on legal interpreting, has also been instrumental to the development of the systemic knowledge of the field. Sign linguistics scholar Leeson’s (2011, 2012) publications apply a sociolinguistics lens to interpreting, and the contributions of Stone have further added recent insight and depth to our knowledge and understanding of interpreting (Stone 2010; Stone and Vinson 2014; Stone and Woll 2008). These authors have many more publications than those cited, and indeed many more academics not singled out here have contributed significantly to our understanding of the process and practice of signed language interpreting in recent years, with reviews of the full range and depth of research in the field and its impact outlined by Napier (2013) and Grbić (2007).

Germane to the issue of scholarly activity in signed language interpreting is that there has also been a groundswell of research initiated by intellectually curious interpreting practitioners who are not full-time academics as such. Essentially they have an interest in a topic or an area of concern informed by their own practice as interpreters, which draws them into conducting and publishing research (Napier 2011). A term for this phenomenon was coined by Gile (1994) when it first occurred among spoken language interpreters. He described practitioner-researchers as ‘practisearchers’. Given the relatively low number of academics in full-time positions at universities who are involved in signed language interpreting research around the world, the contribution of practisearchers has been critical and must be acknowledged.

**Issues and challenges**

The gains made in many countries in education and training practices, and the burgeoning research culture in signed language interpreting have led to a greater understanding of the gaps in the field and an awareness of challenges and concerns related to current practices. One such concern, unique to signed language interpreters, is the risk of occupational overuse injury due to the nature of bimodal interpreting, in which significant cognitive and physical resources are invested. Interpreters receive a message in the source language in one modality, comprehend that message, process and analyse it with a view to finding a semantic equivalent in the target language, reformulate the message into the target language while ensuring linguistic and cultural norms are incorporated, and then produce the target text in a different modality. Signed language interpreters frequently work simultaneously rather than consecutively, so while producing the target utterance in one mode, interpreters are continuing to receive and process the next message from the source language in a different mode, monitoring and repairing the last target utterance as needed, and consciously making coherent links to the next utterance yet to be conveyed (see Chapter 5 on simultaneous interpreting). The physical process of producing signs creates a biomechanical load and muscle tension that can lead to injury. Research by Madden (2005) suggests signed language interpreters are particularly prone to occupational overuse injury due to the likelihood of repetitive strain of the wrists, arms, neck, and shoulders, while under pressure to process and
represent someone else’s words. The task demands more than just ‘talking’ in a signed language, so such injuries are not necessarily experienced at higher rates by deaf people; it appears to be the task of interpreting for someone else that adds a layer of tension to the process and increases the risk of occupational injury in sign language interpreters.

In addition to cognitive and physical stress, there can be a challenge in maintaining an appropriate ‘professional distance’ in the signed language interpreting field. Many signed language users access interpreting services on a cradle to grave basis (Napier et al. 2010) and the Deaf community is not large in some cities and towns, so interpreters often know many of their clients. Interpreters are human beings, and are not neutral conduits or ‘black boxes’ capable of mechanistically conveying information; nor would one want them to be, as that suggests they bring nothing to the interaction in terms of skills, knowledge, abilities, and experience, all of which help to facilitate communication rather than hinder it. Interpreters make professional decisions about the interpreted event, and choices about their interpretation are informed by these subjective and objective judgements and the extent and range of the interpreters’ personal and professional experience. Boundary management can become blurred, particularly when the client is known to the interpreter, or the topic is sensitive (see Chapter 20 on ethics and the role of the interpreter). The parties directly involved in the interaction may amend and adjust their communication to suit the presence of an interpreter; indeed, research suggests the participants are directly influenced by the involvement of an interpreter, and vice versa, and that all parties including the interpreter work towards a joint construction of meaning during an interaction (Wilcox and Schaffier 2005). This can leave interpreters open to experiencing vicarious traumatization as a result of the work they do, and is an issue gaining attention in the field out of concern for interpreter well-being. The risk of compassion fatigue is considered high for signed language interpreters who sometimes know clients due to the nature of the Deaf community, but also as they physically create sometimes graphic signs and ‘readback’ visual scenes, potentially triggering mirror neuron and empathy responses (Bontempo and Malcolm 2012; see Chapter 21 regarding vicarious trauma).

A further challenge for signed language interpreters is that the Deaf community is not a homogeneous group. Deaf people may be native signers from birth, having been born into a signing deaf family, or they may have learned a signed language much later in life, which affects fluency. Some deaf people have residual hearing and speech skills and others do not. More than 90% of deaf people are born into hearing families (Mitchell and Karchmer 2004), and many of these deaf people do not have good communication with members of their family of origin as no one in their family has learned to sign. These diverse backgrounds and factors that impact on language acquisition and linguistic proficiency mean that Deaf community members can be highly variable in their use of signed language. Signed language interpreters have to adapt to this range of linguistic proficiency and accommodate sometimes significant differences and multi-level skills in their interpretations and interactions with deaf people. Sociolinguistic variation is rife in many national signed languages due to settlement patterns, influence from external signed languages, and educational experiences, among other factors. This high degree of variation is further exacerbated by the fact that in most countries there are no resources which would typically help shape the standardization of a language, for example, dictionaries, language planning and policies, television presentation of the ‘standard form’ of the language, and so on (Johnston 2003). This leads to issues for interpreters with regard to quality service provision, but also presents concerns for interpreter educators in relation to teaching approaches, and in assessing interpreter performance.

In relation to providing quality interpreting services, in some places in the world, such as in the Scandinavian region, the UK, the USA, Australia, and some European countries, the education and employment situation for deaf people has shifted and the introduction of equal opportunity
legislation and human rights legislation has led to increased opportunity, creating a growing group of deaf professionals. The needs of these deaf professionals, who may be lawyers, neurologists, teachers, medical practitioners, CEOs, members of parliament, etc., has led to a change in the interpreting field too, with interpreters having to work increasingly from the signed language of a technical expert into a spoken language, with specialized terminology and in a specific register, or in diplomatic or corporate environments – echelons previously the domain of spoken language interpreters only.

This increase in deaf professionals has also seen the rise of the ‘designated interpreter paradigm’. Because some deaf professionals work in highly specialized disciplines, such as medicine or law for example, as the professional giving advice or counsel, or engaging with peers for networking purposes, professional development activities, or performance management, it has become increasingly important for interpreters to share in the knowledge and terminology of the sector that the deaf professional is involved in. This has led to the practice of deaf professionals selecting interpreters from a very small pool of sometimes only one or two, and rarely more than four, interpreters with whom they are willing to work when engaged in their professional work (Bontempo et al. 2014). They feel confident in the capacity and skill of their selected interpreters, resulting in the ‘designated interpreter’ concept (Hauser, Finch and Hauser 2008).

**Current practices and settings**

It has been noted there has been an increase in diplomatic interpreting opportunities for signed language interpreters, as the Deaf community increasingly accesses society on an equal footing with hearing people, and as deaf professionals engage with more opportunities to network and to learn. However, the reality is that most signed language interpreters work in community settings (see Chapters 12–17 for further discussion of these areas of work). A growing area of work in recent years has been broadcast interpreting (television news, emergency announcements during natural disasters, signed translations for websites, and so on), and performance interpreting in the theatre. The range of situations in which signed language interpreters can find themselves assigned to is very diverse, due to the cradle to grave nature of signed language interpreting with deaf people, and can require highly specialized skills in some cases. Specialized skills are necessary when working with a deafblind person, when engaging in theatre interpreting, or when working as part of a team with a deaf interpreter (for example, as the hearing interpreter providing a ‘feed’ from English into BSL to a deaf person working on stage, who then interprets from the BSL relay into International Sign at a conference).

As well as the many professional contexts they may work in, signed language interpreters can find themselves in quite intimate interactions at times, since interpreters are required across the lifespan and in diverse aspects of daily life. It is not uncommon for deaf people to be unable to communicate effectively with their hearing family members, for example, which means that signed language interpreters are often booked to interpret at family gatherings and personal special celebrations, such as 21st birthdays, christenings, weddings, anniversaries, funerals, and so on.

**Trends and recommendations**

In the signed language interpreting field today, demand currently outstrips supply. Agencies, consumers, and interpreters are all seeking ways to work more productively, fulfilling the service need in the community. One of the responses to this in recent years has been the development of video relay services (VRS) and video remote interpreting (VRI) services, which allow deaf and hearing people to connect via visual technology equipment, much like telephone interpreting for
spoken language interpreting clients (see Chapter 22 on remote interpreting). VRS is intended to replace old telecommunications technology for deaf people, such as telephone typewriter relay services, and allows deaf people to now make phone calls to colleagues, friends, family, and business in signed language via an interpreter instead of having to type out their message and have it read aloud by a relay operator and typed back to them. Instead, the phone call is interpreted by a remote interpreter. Differing from VRS, VRI is an interpreted interaction whereby the deaf person and the hearing professional are at one site (for example, an admitting triage nurse and a deaf patient in the emergency room of a hospital) and the interpreter is at a separate location and the parties can communicate via technology. VRI is intended for specific types of appointments that do not require a high level of turn taking, are short in duration, are relatively low risk, and are useful as a temporary measure until an interpreter can reach the site (Lightfoot 2006). In the aforementioned example, a VRI service might be viable upon patient presentation at the emergency room, until an interpreter can get to the hospital to provide a face to face interpreting service.

VRI has become increasingly commonplace in the US, impacting on the work practices of signed language interpreters. In addition, huge call centres have been built to house VRS interpreters, who work in shifts 24 hours a day to meet the telecommunications access needs of the Deaf community. The concern has been that these services will take face to face interpreting services away from the community (Dion 2005), offering guaranteed shifts, annual leave, sick leave, and so on – benefits not typically available to a freelance signed language interpreter. This has altered the workforce and changed work patterns for signed language interpreters. Moreover, it brings linguistic, social, and physical challenges to the VRS and VRI work setting for interpreters, who have since been found to experience higher levels of stress (Dean, Pollard and Samar 2011) compared to interpreters working face to face in education and community settings. The benefits of having an ‘instant interpreter’ in many cases outweigh a lot of the identified concerns with VRS and VRI work, however, and similar services are being, or have been, established in many more countries now, including the UK (McWhinney 2009) and Australia (Napier et al. 2010). The lessons learned from the US experience should be taken into account in establishing VRS and VRI services in other countries.

The increased opportunities presented by technology, the speed and ease of travel in a shrinking world, and the more frequent gathering of deaf people to conduct business at high levels, such as at the United Nations (where the WFD is represented) and at international conferences, have led to the increased use of a sign pidgin commonly known as International Sign (IS). Not based on any single signed language (although influenced by ASL), the use of this pidgin allows deaf people from different nations to be able to communicate reasonably effectively without reverting to a national signed language, if none is shared among the participants present. The high profile events where IS is used, such as the Deaflympics, the International Conference of Educators of the Deaf, the WFD Congress, the WASLI Conference, and so on, have resulted in signed language interpreters viewing this IS work as the pinnacle of the profession. To be an effective IS interpreter, one must be fluent in a number of languages (spoken and signed), generally be a native signer (hearing or deaf), well-educated, and an extremely experienced interpreter. This trend towards using IS in international fora has been largely well received by the Deaf community and interpreters, but there are no standards for selecting IS interpreters to work at this level, no assessment criteria for determining proficiency in IS, and no way at present to formally train and certify signed language interpreters wanting to reach this level of practice. No large-scale empirical studies regarding the comprehensibility of IS have been conducted, either. At the moment, IS interpreters tend to be selected by the deaf professionals concerned who are participating in these high-level interactions at the United Nations and so on, harking back to the gate-keeping role referred to earlier in this chapter. For now, this appears to be
working for the most part, but it may not last for long, and more formalized processes and practices are likely to be called for in the not too distant future. There will also be a demand for empirical research on IS, of which little has been published to date.

International signed language interpreter educator associations have also sprung up. The Conference of Interpreter Trainers (CIT) in the US has a long history, while the Interpreter Trainers Network (ITN) in Australia is a much younger association. Both have a combined international membership of well over 500 signed language interpreter educators, trainers, and mentors and reach into many countries. The training arm of EFSLI (European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters) also extends to many countries in Europe. The smaller scale of the signed language interpreting field makes it easier to develop formal and informal signed language interpreter education networks and to exchange information, knowledge, skills, and resources trans-nationally than it perhaps is for spoken language interpreter educators. Such collaborations have allowed greater standardization and sharing of information regarding certification and accreditation systems, curricula, lesson plans, and the development of repositories of training materials – of considerable benefit to novice educators, trainers, and mentors. The establishment of WASLI has added further cohesion to the scene on an international level. This association is able to provide support to developing countries in particular by liaising with and obtaining resources from more developed nations.

A trend in the US yet to be taken up to the same extent in other countries, but of considerable merit for signed language interpreters, is the notion of service learning (Shaw 2012; Monikowski and Peterson 2005), whereby classroom instruction is combined with community service projects within the Deaf community and students have to contribute in a meaningful way to the local community. Given the increased social distance between Deaf communities and interpreters due to interpreters being less frequently drawn from the community and more often entering the profession via education programs, embedding formal service learning projects in interpreter education programs has been one response to the efforts to re-centre interpreting practice in the Deaf community and is a recommended practice for programs outside the US too.

**Future directions**

The future holds exciting possibilities for signed language interpreters. As technology continues to advance, it is likely that the playing field for signed language interpreters will change. Computer technology and new applications for smart phones, iPads, and tablets are being developed to make interpreter bookings and to conduct short interpreted exchanges until a face to face service is available.

The skills and unique qualities deaf people themselves bring to the role of interpreter are increasingly being recognized, and opportunities for deaf interpreters to gain accreditation and qualifications and to access suitable training and education opportunities are also on the rise. In 2013, deaf interpreters in Australia were granted recognition by NAATI (the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters) for the first time (Bontempo et al. 2014). This marked the first time in the world that a translating and interpreting body for all languages (not just signed language interpreters) had acknowledged the specialized work of deaf interpreters in working between different signed languages, or in signed language translation work (of written materials or of scripted broadcast-type work), and in work with deaf people using non-conventional signed languages. It signalled a great step forward internationally for deaf interpreters. Until NAATI recognition in Australia, deaf interpreters had only ever been credentialed by deaf-specific interpreting accreditation bodies, such as the Registry of
Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) in the US and Signature in the UK. Also in Australia, NAATI recently approved a conference interpreter level of accreditation for signed language interpreters – an elite level of certification not available previously to signed language interpreters, even though they may have been practising at this level. This also opens the door for signed language interpreters to more readily be afforded equal status on the international stage with spoken language conference interpreters.

The tide has turned for signed language interpreters. They are much more likely to be viewed as professionals today, rather than a relative or friend of the deaf person, and the field has matured considerably. However, there remains a need for ongoing professionalization and standardization, and considerable opportunities for development still exist in a number of countries whose interpreters continue to hold ‘fledgling’ or ‘emerging’ status and are not quite as far along the continuum as others. Even in more well-established countries there is work to be done to ensure that signed language interpreting is not seen as a semi-profession and to continue to professionalize our practice, our scholarly pursuits, and our pedagogy.

Signed language interpreting is undoubtedly an area of rapid evolution and growth. Not only is the demand for quality interpreting services outstripping the available supply of interpreters in many countries around the world, it is a field that has seen rapid change in a relatively short period of time. We have achieved increased acceptance in the academy and the number of doctoral candidates and leaders and scholars in the field is on the rise, albeit slowly. A burgeoning culture of research, larger steps towards the professionalization of the field, greater numbers of higher education institutions delivering interpreter education programs, and the increased expectations of the Deaf community and other service users have led to remarkable transformations within the signed language interpreting sector in recent years. While there is considerable work yet to do in various parts of the world, technological advancements have opened up the marketplace in many ways to new forms of interpreting, and have made the world smaller in terms of accessing professional development and online resources for interpreter networking. Greater alignment with the spoken language interpreting sector on common issues, and increasing global opportunities for cooperation, all help interpreters to share information and knowledge, moving the field forward together.

Further reading


A textbook on the application of demand control schema to the signed language interpreting profession. Provides detailed information on the DC-S framework for effective decision making, and on the observation-supervision of signed language interpreters.

Grbić, Nadja. (2007). Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going? A bibliometrical analysis of writings and research on sign language interpreting. The Sign Language Translator and Interpreter (SLTI): Volume 1, Number 1: 15–51

A good overview of the 908 publications on signed language interpreting research between 1970 and 2005.

A particularly useful volume, raising some thought-provoking issues. A diverse group of scholars in the field contribute to this volume, addressing issues of signed language interpreting history, education, research and practice in a number of countries.


An excellent volume drawing together information on the signed language interpreter education, training and mentoring context of a large number of countries.


Although written for an Australian and New Zealand readership, this textbook has much to offer signed language interpreting students and practitioners irrespective of specific language combinations.


The website of the international association for signed language interpreters.

References


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Signed language interpreting


(2011). "If a tree falls in a forest and no one is there to hear it, does it make a noise? The merits of publishing interpreting research." In B. Nicodemus and L. Swabey (eds) *Advances in interpreting research: Inquiry in action*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, pp.121–52.


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Introduction

Historically, signed language interpreting has been treated separately from spoken language interpreting in terms of theoretical discussions, research, education, and professional practice. However, there is growing recognition that signed languages should be included among all the languages to be considered in terms of interpreting practice. The interpreting studies field has recognized the value of contrasting spoken and signed language interpreting and then bringing discussions together under the single umbrella of interpreting studies. This shift was made particularly evident with the publication of Pöchhacker’s (2004) book *Introducing Interpreting Studies*, which makes many references to various signed language interpreting research studies and publications. The shift is further evidenced through increasing cross-linguistic and cross-modality collaboration in the education of interpreters, in research on interpreting, and in the number of publications that feature discussions of spoken and signed language interpreting issues across genres of interpreting practice. (See, for example, Chapter 6 on consecutive interpreting.)

Although there are many similarities, there are still some distinct aspects of signed language interpreting practice and professionalism that diverge from spoken language interpreting norms. This chapter discusses the similarities and differences between the two types of interpreting in terms of the historical development, the current situation, research findings, training, and future directions.

**Definition of terms**

Modality: The mode of language expression being utilized, whether spoken or signed.
Bimodal interpreting: Interpreting that occurs between a signed and a spoken language (e.g., British Sign Language and English).
Unimodal interpreting: Interpreting that occurs either between two signed languages (e.g., British Sign Language and American Sign Language) or between two spoken languages (e.g., English and Spanish).
Directionality: The working language direction of the interpretation, e.g., English to French, or German Sign Language to German.
Intralingual interpreting: Interpreting by restructuring the message in a different way within the same language.

History/early developments

There are many major contributors to the evolution of our understanding of the similarities and differences between spoken and signed language interpreting. A particular contribution to bridging the gap between signed and spoken language interpreting scholars and practitioners has been made by those that have either written about both spoken and signed language interpreting to illustrate examples of interpreting practice or process, or have conducted research that has made an impact on both sides of the proverbial interpreting divide. As mentioned earlier, Pöchhacker (2004, 2010) provides reference to both spoken and signed language interpreting research to illustrate examples of the ‘turns’ and paradigms in interpreting research. Shlesinger (2009) is also well known for her support of signed language interpreting research. Mikkelsen, who specializes in spoken language legal interpreting, has worked closely with the signed language interpreter educator Solow, to provide the joint training of interpreters from refugee communities (Mikkelsen and Solow 2002) and I, personally, have worked closely with spoken language interpreting research and educator colleagues to promote joint training and research opportunities. Grbić and Turner – both originally from the signed language sector – have also written about generic interpreting issues by contrasting signed and spoken language interpreting practices and role (e.g., Grbić 2008; Turner 2007). Roy’s (2000) seminal research, which revealed how interpreters manage turn-taking (which was based on the analysis of a signed language interpreter), has made a particular impact in the field of interpreting studies, and is one of the most widely-cited studies in both spoken and signed language interpreting literature; and newer scholars such as Xiao, who comes from a spoken language background, are breaking new ground by examining signed language interpreting practices in China (Xiao and Riuling 2009; Xiao and Li 2013). Ultimately, in the last decade in particular, the work of all these authors has led to an increased dialogue across language and modality boundaries in interpreting studies, which is evident through more frequent publications featuring work from both spoken and signed language scholars, such as Valero–Garcés and Martin (2008) and Nicodemus and Swabey (2011).

In terms of historical development, the key contrast between signed and spoken language interpreting is in relation to the nature of the professionalization process, which was influenced by how interpreting was formalized as a profession and who chose (or was chosen) to become an interpreter.

In comparison to the spoken language sector, signed language interpreting became professionalized first in community settings, whereas spoken language interpreting gained professional recognition first in conference settings. There is documented evidence of signed language interpreting provided in courts and other contexts from as early as the 1600s in the Ottoman Court (Stone 2012), and in the London courts in the 1700s (Stone and Woll 2008). In more modern times, signed language interpreters were working with deaf people in medical, legal, and other public service settings before they started working at conference level (Grbić 2006; Napier 2011a). Signed language interpreters were thus accustomed to working bilaterally, in dialogic, interactive contexts long before the formal recognition of community interpreting as a profession in the spoken language sector. In fact, in the UK from 1928, the Deaf Welfare Examination Board included an interpreting task as part of its examination procedures; and in the USA the first professional signed language interpreting association was established in 1964 in recognition of the need to formalize the work that many people were doing in the Deaf community. This served to provide an infrastructure for the development of signed language interpreting as a
profession (Napier and Roy in press). Since 1964, professional signed language interpreting associations have continued being established worldwide, for example in Sweden (1969), Canada (1980), Finland and Scotland (1982), England, Wales and Northern Ireland (1987), Australia and Japan (1991), Austria (1998), Kosovo (2006) (Napier and Goswell 2013), and the most recent in Iceland (2014). The signed language interpreting profession is still emerging in many countries, which is why associations are still being established, and the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters was only constituted in 2005. These associations have traditionally adopted codes of ethics from neighbouring spoken language interpreter associations and feature the same key tenets of impartiality/neutrality, accuracy/fidelity, and confidentiality as would be found in spoken language codes (Rodriguez and Guerrero 2002), although changes are also evidenced (see later discussion of community influence in this chapter).

Bontempo provides more detail in her discussion of the professionalization of signed language interpreting in Chapter 7, but authors such as Cokely (2005b) and Stone (2008) have documented how traditionally signed language interpreters have ‘evolved’ from the Deaf community: they were selected by community members not only for their sufficient technical signing skills, but for having the right attitude towards the community, its language, culture, and customs. Long before formal training programmes were available, signed language interpreters were typically recruited from people who had either grown up in the Deaf community, that is, hearing people who had deaf parents and used sign language at home (Children of Deaf Adults – Codas), or they were teachers of deaf children or welfare workers who worked closely with members of the Deaf community (Napier, McKee and Goswell 2010). The salient difference between signed and conference spoken language interpreters in this regard is that: (a) previously you could not choose to be a signed language interpreter, you had to be chosen; and (b) the notion of being a ‘schooled’ interpreter (Cokely 2005b), that is, that one could apply for a university training programme in signed language interpreting, is relatively recent.

However, when comparing the advent of professionalization between signed and spoken language community interpreting, the difference is not so stark. Research has shown children from immigrant families often serve as the family interpreter/mediator/communicator when the family relocates to another country (Orellana 2009) because the children acquire the majority language more quickly than their parents. This practice has been referred to as ‘child language brokering’ (Hall and Guery 2010), in order to distinguish it from that of professional interpreters. In such contexts, young people have been found to broker for their parents and other family members, particularly in public service settings such as legal and medical appointments (Tse 1996), and therefore they are effectively functioning from a very early age as non-professional community interpreters (for a broader discussion of non-professional interpreting, see Chapter 26 in this Handbook). The most mature and linguistically-proficient children are typically chosen by their family members (Orellana 2009). This same phenomenon has also been found to be true of Codas, who often begin brokering from a very young age and then fall into working as professional signed language interpreters as adults (Napier in press). Both spoken and signed language child brokers report feeling positive about their brokering experiences, and feeling honoured and proud to have been chosen to perform such a role. In fact, it has been suggested that the bilingual skills of these child language brokers should be harnessed as a form of giftedness, and that young bilinguals should be encouraged to pursue interpreting as a professional career choice (Napier in press; Valdes et al. 2003; Angelelli 2010). Therefore, within minority communities, regardless of language modality, it would seem that in fact interpreting is regarded as having high status, as only particular young people are chosen to perform this task. Perhaps this should be considered the more elite form of interpreting? To be chosen by your community to fulfil such a role is indeed an honour, but more research is needed to better understand why it
happens and also to educate service providers and families about the need to utilize professional interpreting services wherever possible.

Since the early days, professional practices have become more aligned between signed and spoken language interpreting in both community and conference settings, although as of yet, there is no systematic, separate (university-level) conference interpreter training for signed language interpreters (see later section on regulation and training).

Although we see similar footing in terms of professional recognition by examining the historical development of spoken and signed language interpreting, there are some differences in current practices and trends.

**Current situation/trends**

Essentially, signed language interpreters share the same values and aspirations as their spoken language counterparts in relation to norms of behaviour (role), standards, ethics, professional associations, regulation, testing, and training. As with the broader interpreting field, signed language interpreting practice is diverse, with wide variation internationally in terms of stages of professionalization, provision of interpreter training, and certification. In this section I will concentrate on those issues that centrally provide a point of comparison between spoken and signed language interpreters by focusing on discussion of professional practices, community influence on interpreting practice, regulation and training, and research findings.

**Professional practices**

If you ask any spoken or signed language interpreter for their definition of interpreting, it is likely they will give you the same answer. The goal for any interpreter is to ensure that two or more people who do not use the same language come to understand the same message. Over time there have been many psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic theories with regards to the interpreting process and construction of meaning which have influenced notions of the role of the interpreter (Roy 1993; Shaffer 2013), and more research is needed to better understand how we ‘do’ understanding and engage in the juggling act that is interpreting (Turner 2010), but essentially the process is the same regardless of whether the languages are spoken or signed. However, when you drill down a little more, it can be seen that the professional practices of spoken and signed language interpreters are slightly different in terms of language modality, interpreting mode, and directionality.

Spoken language interpreters work unimodally, that is, the two languages between which they interpret are in the same mode: the languages are audio-verbal languages that are produced and heard one word at a time in a linear fashion. Signed language interpreters, however, work bimodally. Signed languages are not visual representations of the spoken word, but have their own grammatically distinct structures that are capable of complex and abstract expression, equivalent to (but different from) any spoken language (Sutton-Spence and Woll 1998). So signed language interpreters work between two languages that function in different modalities: a spoken language (linear), and a signed language, which is visual-gestural and simultaneously incorporates the use of various articulators including the head, facial features (eyes, eyebrows, mouths, lips, cheeks), shoulders, body, both hands and fingers, and the space in front of their body to co-construct lexical (content) signs and convey temporal and grammatical information (Johnston and Schembri 2007). It can be particularly challenging for signed language interpreters to work bimodally, as succinctly explained in relation to interpreting between English and British Sign Language (BSL):
BSL encodes visual information as a matter of course. Let us imagine what might seem like a fairly straightforward piece of information: person X recounts how he went into a pub, bought a pint of beer, and was short-changed by the bar-tender. We know that in English we could embellish this account in all sorts of ways, but a typical BSL account would include certain types of visual information automatically; it would be more unusual to exclude those than to include them. Thus, we may well be able to glean from the BSL account what kind of doors the pub had, e.g., double swing doors, a single swing door, a door with a round knob or a door with a vertical handle; we may be able to discern that the bar-tender was a large man with stubble and a cigarette hanging out of his mouth; we may be able to tell that the counter was curved, that the place was crowded and X had to elbow his way in and so on. Now it is quite possible to present all of this information in the English language. However, when we say ‘I went into a pub’ in English we do not typically add information which indicates how we went in, what kind of door we opened, what kind of handle it had, and so on. In BSL, not only is it typical to include such information, it is often unavoidable.

(Brennan and Brown 1997: 121–2)

It could be argued that spoken language interpreters also have the challenge of finding appropriate meaningful equivalents in each language, but in this instance, signed language interpreters have to decide what visual information to retain and what to omit, both of which can have a major impact on the message delivered.

The fact that signed language interpreters work bimodally also influences the nature of the ‘translation style’ that they adopt (Napier 2002), as they are susceptible to the influences of language contact. Language contact essentially involves transference of linguistic features from one language to another at different levels of language (Clyne 2003). A common form of language contact between a signed and spoken language is that of code-mixing (Lucas and Valli 1992), also referred to as code-blending (Emmorey, Borenstein and Thompson 2003). Code-blending between a spoken and signed language (such as English and American Sign Language) involves words being mouthed on the lips or manually coded (fingerspelled) while the signer is still using linguistic visual features of the signed language. Lucas and Valli (1992) suggest a variety of sociolinguistic factors that influence deaf people’s use of blending between a signed and a spoken language, one of which is the formality of a situation. Interpreters have also been found to adopt blending in their bimodal interpreting, especially in formal presentations in conference or university settings. Adopting a more ‘literal’ translation style, interpreters have been found to effectively incorporate aspects of the spoken language into their signed language interpretations through following the grammatical structure of the spoken language, using mouthing and/or fingerspelling, in order to provide access to formal, academic or technical language or to emphasize particular terms (Davis 2003; Napier 2006; Metzger and Quadros 2012). Code-mixing is also used in spoken languages when a bilingual person switches from one language to another during a conversation, and it regularly occurs between bilingual users of more than one spoken language. It can occur either intersententially or intrasententially at an individual or multiple lexical level (Clyne 2003), yet to use it in spoken language interpreting would only be acceptable when a term from one language is borrowed into the other as an established, conventional calque. For example, in Chinese Mandarin the term ‘p.p.t.’ – pronounced pee-pee-tee – is borrowed from English.

Bimodal interpreting also has an influence on the interpreting mode (or technique) used by signed language interpreters. In order to avoid the audio ‘clash’ between two spoken languages
being used at the same time, spoken language interpreters typically work simultaneously in conference settings when appropriate equipment is available, and in consecutive mode in face-to-face dialogic communication in community settings (see Chapters 5 and 6). Occasionally simultaneous whispering (chuchotage) is used when monologic presentations or structured question-answer interactions are used in formal contexts such as smaller conferences/seminars or in court. For signed language interpreters, however, one language is silent so there is no interference between the two working languages. For this reason, signed language interpreters most commonly work simultaneously in all contexts. But research has shown that it can be more effective for signed language interpreters to work consecutively (Russell 2002), especially when complex information is being presented. Padden (2000), in fact, argues that signed language interpreters should consider interpreting in consecutive mode more often so they can operate in one language modality at a time, whereas when working simultaneously the two modalities co-occur and thus put additional strain on the interpreting process.

Thus far, I have provided a comparison between unimodal and bimodal practices of spoken language and signed language interpreters with the assumption that the signed language interpreters can hear, and thus are working between a spoken and a signed language. However, there are some signed language interpreters that do work unimodally between two signed languages. These are deaf interpreters who work in a variety of contexts (Boudreault 2005). Deaf interpreters work in conference settings either by reading from written speech-to-text autocue, or by ‘reading’ the message in another signed language where the hearing interpreter is in a relay function. In community settings, deaf interpreters typically work from another relay interpreter. For example, a spoken English presentation may be relayed from English into BSL by a hearing interpreter, and then interpreted from BSL into American Sign Language (ASL) by the deaf interpreter for the American conference audience (see also Chapter 11 on conference interpreting). Another issue that is different between spoken and signed language interpreters who work specifically in conference-like settings is in relation to working languages and preference for directionality, which is discussed in Chapter 7.

What provides the most interesting point of comparison with spoken language interpreters, however, is the fact that deaf interpreters working in community settings (e.g., medical, legal) often work intra-lingually within one signed language. A deaf interpreter is typically employed in these settings along with a hearing interpreter when the hearing interpreter is unable to effectively communicate directly with a deaf client, for example, where the client uses idiosyncratic signs or gestures, or ‘home signs’ which are unique to a family; uses a foreign sign language; has minimal or limited language skills; is deafblind or deaf with limited vision; uses signs particular to a given region, ethnic or age group that are not known by the hearing interpreter; or is in a mental state that makes ordinary interpreted communication especially difficult (Napier, McKee and Goswell 2010; Stone 2012). Deaf people’s experience of making themselves understood non-verbally, their first-hand knowledge of diverse communication and personal backgrounds in the Deaf community, and their ability to conceptualize experiences and ideas through the eyes of a deaf person can give them a repertoire of visual communication skills that hearing interpreters cannot necessarily emulate. In these contexts, the deaf interpreter takes the message from a hearing interpreter, who is signing in an established sign language (such as BSL), and re-frames the message into a different form within the same signed language. For example, a doctor speaks in English / relayed from English into BSL by a hearing interpreter / interpreted from BSL into a more basic, visual form of BSL by the deaf interpreter for a deaf patient who has limited language skills. It could be argued that spoken language interpreters also work intralingually when working between different varieties of the same language (for example between standard French and the variant spoken in New Caledonia), although this has not been presented widely in the literature as such.
Now that the differing professional practices between spoken and signed language interpreters have been outlined, another issue to consider in terms of similarity and difference is the influence that the minority language community has on interpreting practice.

**Community influence**

One particular point of difference between spoken and signed language interpreters is the way in which deaf people themselves have influenced the evolution and change of the interpreter role as well as perceptions of ethical behaviour. Deaf people have a strong vested interest in informing the working practices of signed language interpreters; perhaps because deaf people’s usage of interpreters is more frequent, across more domains, and lasts for a lifetime (Napier, McKee and Goswell 2010). In many countries now, especially the USA and UK, there is a strong trend to encourage ‘deaf-led’ signed language interpreting services, whereby deaf people themselves are front and centre in the delivery of those services (see for example, http://remark.uk.com/interpreting – accessed 29 Sept. 2014). This philosophy promotes the idea of a ‘deaf translation norm’ (Stone 2009) thus urging hearing non-native signers to consider culturally appropriate ways to interpret information from and into signed language so that it is meaningful to the participants (Cokely 2001).

Deaf people were integral in the shift to professionalization. With the adoption of human rights (disability) legislation in many countries, beginning in the 1980s and 1990s, which reinforced the rights of linguistic minorities, including deaf people, in terms of access to education, employment, and services through accommodations (such as interpreting), deaf people were able to assert that they no longer needed help, just access. This perspective initiated the shift from a situation where hearing people who worked in various roles in the Deaf community (e.g., teacher, welfare worker) and who did interpreting ‘on the side’, to a situation in which interpreting was viewed as a profession in its own right.

The change in perception from ‘helper’ to ‘professional’ was assisted by the fact that conference interpreters working simultaneously in a booth have proximal distance from their clients, giving rise to an interpreter role that promoted impartiality, neutrality, and distance. Early discussions of signed language interpreting clearly endorse adhering to such a ‘conduit’ model of interpreting in order to be seen as professional (Frishberg 1990; Solow 1981) However, it was not long before this model was hotly debated in the Deaf community and at related conferences, whereby vocal deaf people were pointing out that the model of distance and impartiality did not marry with the values of the Deaf community, as deaf people felt it important to have a say about who could enter their community and be exposed to their language and culture (e.g., Phillip 1994) (see also my earlier discussion of ‘evolved’ versus ‘schooled’ interpreters). This debate was also echoed in the professional signed language interpreting community, with recognition that adoption of such a model did not meet the needs of the Deaf community and also did not allow for natural intercultural communication to occur (Pollitt 1997; Mindess 1999).

We then saw a shift to what was referred to as the bilingual-bicultural/ally model (McIntire and Sanderson 1995), where deaf people recognized that in order to best meet their communicative needs, they needed to work collaboratively with signed language interpreters. As a result of signed language interpreting research (see section on research below and Chapter 7 in this volume), we are now at a point where the interpreter is recognized as a participant in the interaction, and deaf professionals, in particular, are very clear about how they want to work with interpreters, what they need, and what they expect. In fact they are leading the way in articulating the need for interpreters to participate and interact with interlocutors in the workplace (Hauser, Finch and Hauser 2008; Dickinson 2008). Based on authentic data of interpreter-mediated
communication analysed in various languages (see introduction section above and also the
discussion in Chapter 7), a model of ‘interpreter as participant and co-constructor of meaning’ is
now widely acknowledged in spoken language community interpreting literature too. It might
thus be said that signed language interpreters and the Deaf community trail-blazed the notion of
interpreter role (Turner 2013).

In recognition of this shift in the interpreter role, it was also asserted that the codes of ethics
for signed language interpreters were not written in a way that reflected what interpreters really
needed to do to ensure effective communication (Tate and Turner 1997). Thus, in an attempt
to further embed the values of the Deaf community into signed language interpreting practice,
Cokely (2000) suggested that codes of ethics should be revised to account for the rights and
expectations of the various stakeholders in any communicative event (i.e., deaf people, inter-
preters, hearing clients, interpreting service agencies), and that key principles in codes of ethics
should be re-framed to allow for more flexibility in professional conduct (Leneham and Napier
2003). As a consequence some professional signed language interpreter associations, such as the
American, Canadian and Australian associations (the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, RID;
the Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada, AVLIC; the Australian Sign
Language Interpreters’ Association, ASLIA) have revised their codes of ethics to establish new
‘Codes of Professional Conduct’ (Swabey and Mickelson 2008); but only the Canadian and
Australian codes clearly embody the values outlined by Cokely by specifically outlining the
values of the association in their codes.

In conversation with spoken language interpreters, it seems that the minority language
communities for which they interpret do not have the same influence on the working practices of
spoken language interpreters. This could be for several reasons: (i) Spoken language interpreters
are likely to belong to the same ethnic group as the client (Gentile, Vasilikakos and Ozolins
1996), and therefore they are members of the community for whom they interpret, and are seen
as able to represent the needs of that community. This is different for the hearing interpreters of
the Deaf community, who may be accepted by the Deaf community (Padden 1980) but they
will never be considered as true members of the ethnic group due to the fact that they can hear, so
therefore they feel a debt to that community for granting them entry. The notion of reciprocity in
exchange for that permission is a strong value in the Deaf community (Phillip 1994). (ii) Spoken
language interpreting is referred to as a homogeneous profession, but in fact is heterogeneous as
it involves a myriad of languages, communities, and cultures (Rudvin 2007). For minority language
communities, then, trying to influence the working practices of interpreters may be challenging
considering the many communities and cultures represented. Signed language interpreters, on the
other hand, typically work with one community, one language, and one culture (in a particular
country). For this reason, it may be easier for that community to have such a strong influence on
the working practices of those signed language interpreters as they are unique to their context.

Although the level of influence that the Deaf community has on the signed language inter-
preting profession appears to be different from that of other language groups on spoken language
interpreters, one area of similarity between signed language and spoken language community
interpreters is the notion of trust between interpreters and the minority community for whom
they interpret. Edwards, Temple and Alexander (2005) explored the experiences of 50 minority
ethnic people of Chinese, Kurdish, Bangladeshi, Indian, and Polish descent living in two major
cities in the United Kingdom who needed interpreters to gain access to and use a range of
services in the community. They found that the interpreter’s personal character and level of
trustworthiness are important in people’s understanding of what makes a good interpreter,
leading them to prefer those drawn from their own informal networks (i.e., family and friends).
Moreover, they concluded that trust may offset consumers’ concerns about interpreters’
bilingual competence. The same has been found with the Deaf community: Napier and Rohan (2007) and Napier (2011b) elicited perceptions from deaf Australians through a diary survey study and focus groups, and found that trust was a key factor in determining their level of comfort in working with individual interpreters. In this sense, it could be said that the spoken and signed language minority communities have an influence on the practice of interpreters, as they identify those interpreters who are most trusted by members of the community.

In terms of current trends, one final area to compare between spoken and signed language interpreting is in relation to the similarities and differences in regulation and training.

**Regulation and training**

Even though the Deaf community is recognized as a linguistic and cultural minority (Ladd 2003, Lane, Hoffmeister and Bahan 1996), the provision of signed language interpreting still typically falls under disability legislation and funding in most countries, as opposed to provisions for interpreting for migrant populations. For example, in Australia, signed language interpreting provision comes under the remit of the Australian Federal Government’s Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs. Aboriginal interpreting services also fall under the umbrella of this department. Community interpreting in all other spoken languages, however, is the responsibility of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

Consequently, the regulation of spoken and signed language interpreting varies from country to country. Based on a snapshot of a range of nations worldwide (Napier 2009), it can be seen that there are essentially three different models of regulation that dictate the standards, entry-to-practice competencies, and certification processes for signed language interpreting in relation to spoken language interpreting:

- signed language interpreting-specific – regulation through a deaf/ sign language-specific body that has its own policies, procedures and processes (e.g., Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf for testing and certification, and the Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers for programme accreditation in the USA);
- mapped – regulation occurs through a signed language interpreting-specific body that has its own policies, procedures and processes, but the competencies are mapped onto the same standards as spoken language interpreters (e.g., Signature in the UK, and the National Vocational Qualification framework and National Occupational Standards for Interpreting for all languages); and
- integrated – where spoken and signed language interpreters are regulated and accredited through the same system and organization (e.g., the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters in Australia, which accredits all languages through testing and training programme approval).

In terms of training, signed language interpreter training has been well-established in further and higher education for many decades, especially in the USA where there are over 150 interpreter training programmes at associate, bachelor’s, and master’s levels. However, as with spoken language community interpreter training more generally, in countries where the signed language interpreting profession is still emerging, training is initially offered on an ad hoc basis in the form of short, intensive courses to eliminate ‘unsatisfactory social practice’ among inexperienced and/or untrained interpreters (Grbić 2001), until the field becomes more professionalized.

Based on the historical perception of ‘deafness as disability’, the majority of university signed language interpreter training programmes are housed in education, social services, special
education, or rehabilitation departments, but we are beginning to witness a new trend in which programmes are integrated into languages or linguistics departments alongside spoken languages, where spoken and signed language interpreting students are taught alongside one another either in the same programme or complementary programmes (e.g., Heriot-Watt University in the UK, Macquarie University in Australia, and Graz University in Austria). This is a positive paradigm shift that reiterates the fact that spoken and signed language interpreters undertake similar tasks and thus can be trained in similar contexts.

Signed language interpreter training in universities has a long-established focus on dialogue interpreting, in recognition of the fact that the majority of signed language interpreting takes place in the community; and interpreters are thus trained to work consecutively and simultaneously in a range of public service settings (Cokely 2005a). The only specific course for signed language conference interpreting is offered at the Sorbonne (Séro-Guillaume 2010). University, spoken language, conference interpreter training programmes are more established, on the other hand, and there is no clear model for dialogue interpreter training in the spoken language interpreting sector (Pöchhacker 2013). Signed language interpreter training models could assist in providing a missing link between spoken language conference interpreting and spoken language community interpreting training.

One distinct difference between spoken and signed language interpreter training is the fact that for signed language interpreting students, there is no ‘Deafland’ where students can go and live to immerse themselves in the language and culture of the deaf community. In spoken language interpretation programmes, on the other hand, it is frequently a requirement that students spend time completely immersed in the language and culture. For example, Heriot-Watt University in Scotland requires its third year spoken language students to spend one year in the country of their language. At the same university, as an alternative solution, BSL students are required to undertake two six-month community placements in organizations where BSL is used by deaf staff every day. This is the only programme in the world (and at least the only one in the UK) that has such a requirement.

A recent popular approach to bridge this gap is to encourage student engagement with the Deaf community through ‘service learning’ in signed language interpreter training programmes (Shaw 2013). This approach introduces students to experiential as well as classroom learning, whereby students participate in Deaf community activities (e.g., answering phones at interpreting service, visiting elderly deaf patients, providing child care to a deaf family) or provide pro-bono interpreting in low-risk situations; so students learn about ‘the significance of membership in a community while reflecting on the importance of reciprocity and the symbiotic nature of learning and living’ (Monikowski and Peterson 2005: 195). The difference between service learning and the immersion experience described above is that during the immersion (community placement) experience, the students are expected to use the sign language every day and enculturate themselves to Deaf community norms. In service learning, however, students are required to develop projects that are of direct benefit to the Deaf community.

**Research bridging signed language interpreting and spoken language interpreting**

Other chapters have given in-depth overviews of research findings in conference, community, and signed language interpreting studies, so for the purposes of this chapter I will focus on those studies that have had an impact on both spoken and signed language interpreting, or have directly compared spoken and signed language interpreting, or signed language interpreting studies that draw heavily on replication of existing spoken language interpreting research frameworks and findings for analytical purposes.
Both the spoken and signed fields of interpretation have benefitted greatly from the work of Cynthia Roy (2000) and Cecilia Wadensjö (1998), which has influenced our understanding of the role of interpreter as participant in the interaction and co-constructor of meaning from a sociolinguistic point of view. However, very little interpreting research has directly compared spoken and signed language interpreting. Earlier psycholinguistic research examined the interpreting process through the analysis and comparison of spoken and signed language simultaneous interpreting, and the examination of interpreter memory recall (Isham and Lane 1993, 1994). In fact, Isham (1995) claimed that research into signed language interpreting could contribute to a better understanding of the cognitive process of interpreting in general. Gran Tarabocchia and Bidoli (2001) report on a study comparing the working memory of five spoken language interpreting students to one professional Italian Sign Language (LIS)/Italian interpreter’s performance, and found that the LIS interpreter obtained similar results on an LIS working memory span task as five spoken language interpreting students did on an Italian listening span task. More recently, Nicodemus and Emmorey (2012) examined perceptions of preferred working language direction of spoken and signed language interpreters and found that spoken language interpreters typically prefer, and feel more proficient, interpreting from their second into their first language (L2-to-L1) and perceive L1-to-L2 interpreting to be more stressful and tiring; but that signed language interpreters not only preferred but also felt more proficient working from their L1 into L2, and that native signers largely expressed no directionality preferences. The only other studies in this category have compared predictors for success in spoken and signed language interpreting students: (i) Shaw, Grbić and Franklin (2004) held focus groups with spoken and signed language interpreting students to explore their perceptions of how readily they can apply language skills to their interpreting studies. They found that both spoken and signed language students quickly realized the difference between bilingual competence and interpreting competence. (ii) Stauffer and Shaw (2006) administered a personality questionnaire to 1379 spoken and signed language interpreting students, but did not find any significant predictive characteristics.

One other point of comparison between spoken and signed language interpreting research is where signed language interpreting researchers have replicated spoken language interpreting studies to examine processes or products in signed language interpreting. For example, in replicating aspects of the methodology of previous studies of working memory capacity and spoken language interpreting (such as Zhang 2009; Liu et al. 2004), a mixed methods study to investigate working memory and effects of directionality on interpreting performance was conducted with 31 professional Auslan (Australian Sign Language)/English interpreters (Wang 2013; Wang and Napier 2013). After completion of two interpreting tasks, a listening span task, and a working memory task, Wang found no significant correlations between the professional interpreters’ working memory capacity and their simultaneous interpreting performance, suggesting that the professional interpreters’ working memory capacity is not closely associated with their simultaneous interpreting performance. Another example involved the replication and application of Wadensjö’s taxonomy to signed language interpreting in healthcare to explore the concept of ‘accuracy’ (Major and Napier 2012). The findings supported Wadensjö’s work in identifying that interpreters use a range of strategies to produce an accurate interpretation, including expanded, reduced and close renditions.

**Future directions**

Given the slow emergence of more collaboration between spoken and signed language interpreting researchers, the future looks bright, with possibilities of increasing collaboration and
replication of research across modalities. The publication of the first spoken and signed language co-authored book on interpreting research methods (Hale and Napier 2013) is a major positive step in this direction. Shlesinger (2009) called for more replication of interpreting studies in order to test phenomena across different languages, and the same applies to replicating work across modalities. It is also hoped that spoken language researchers will consider replicating methodologies from signed language interpreting studies too, to enrich our understanding of interpreting processes and products. Another positive step is to see greater international collaboration between signed language interpreting researchers (Shaw 2006), and theoretical constructs that have emerged in the signed language sector being shared with the spoken language sector (Dean and Pollard 2011). Greater interaction across the interpreting sector can potentially lead to increased collaboration in terms of service delivery, standards, training, and professional representation.

Further reading

This book provides an overview of how to approach conducting research in interpreting, with examples from spoken and signed language interpreting research studies.

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the development of the signed language interpreting profession, practice and research, with discussion of the current situation and future directions.

This edited volume brings together seminal articles in signed language interpreting, which have moved the field forward in terms of understanding processes and practices.

This edited volume features various chapters on interpreting research from spoken and signed language interpreting scholars.

This seminal book provides a thorough overview of the development of interpreting studies as a discipline, drawing on spoken and signed language interpreting research.

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Comparing signed and spoken language interpreting


Introduction

Sight translation (ST) is the oral translation of a written text. When performing the task, the sight translator reads a written text, processes the meaning quickly, and orally translates the text while it is still being read. Sight translation involves visual input of a written message and oral output of its meaning, a hybrid form of language mediation that partially resembles both the translation and the interpretation processes. Herbert (1952, quoted in Agrifoglio, 2004) characterizes sight translation as a type of simultaneous interpreting. When used in an interpreting context where a speaker delivers the source message based on a written transcript, which the sight translator has access to while listening to the original speech, the act of sight translation becomes sight interpreting (Qin and He, 2009; Pöchhacker, 2004) or sight interpretation (Lambert, 2004).

This chapter aims to provide an overview of sight translation, some issues and debates surrounding this unique communication skill, and its applications in the professional and academic settings.

Definition of key terms

Broadly speaking, any rendition of a written message in one language into oral form in another language can be called sight translation. A case in point would be a bilingual tour guide explaining a brochure of a historic site written in English to tourists from a foreign country. In a conference setting where live speeches are delivered, interpreters may be given the speech texts in advance, allowing them to perform sight interpretation, or specifically simultaneous interpreting with text (SIT) or consecutive interpreting with text (CIT) (see Chapter 5 on simultaneous interpreting).

A sight translator needs to read ahead while orally translating the current segment of message. This is to ensure a smooth delivery of the translation without causing unnecessary interruption in the reception of the message for the audience. Reading ahead usually involves glancing over the ensuing sentence in order to determine whether certain linguistic elements need to be re-structured for the purpose of conforming to target norms. It is because of this constant shifting of the translator’s visual contact with the source text and its presence in written form that sight translation is often considered a much more difficult task than other modes of interpretation (Mikkelsen et al., 1995).
During the process of sight translation, it might be helpful to **chunk** or **parse** the source text into smaller **meaning units** so as to lessen the burden of information processing, facilitate understanding, and speed up rendition into the target language. Chunking or parsing makes it easier for sight translators to deal with long and complex sentences, especially when the source and target languages differ dramatically in syntax and meaning formulation.

### Historical perspectives and developments

Sight translation has been extensively used for many pedagogical and professional purposes. It has played a role in many classrooms in the teaching of Latin (Luce, 2012) and many modern languages. The U.S. Department of Education implements programs to help state and district authorities test English language learners by using their native languages offered through ST in assessments of reading/language arts and mathematics (Stansfield, 2008). Traditionally, ST has been widely used in laying the foundation for acquiring skills in consecutive and simultaneous interpreting (Weber, 1990; Viaggio, 1995). Some translation and interpretation training programs even use ST for aptitude tests in the admissions process (Moser-Mercer, 1994). ST is also part of the testing components in the certification of court interpreters in Canada and the U.S.

Professionally, more and more translators now dictate their first draft of translations into a digital recorder using ST, and then convert the resulting sound file to an editable written format with the help of voice recognition software. As an indispensable mode of interpretation in any bilingual or multilingual communicative event, ST is frequently needed in a vast array of settings that require immediate access to information presented in a foreign language. ST is widely used in:

- international conferences and organizations, e.g. speeches, presentations, workshops, etc., presented in paper format or on screen, delivered in conjunction with simultaneous or consecutive interpreting (see Chapters 5 and 6 on simultaneous and consecutive interpreting, respectively);
- bilateral meetings, e.g. contract signing, business negotiations, etc.;
- escort interpreting, e.g. exhibitions, tours, site visits, etc.;
- hospitals, e.g. patient instructions, medical records, consent forms, procedural and safety guidelines, release instructions, etc.; and
- court: e.g. sentencing order, bail or probation conditions, indictments, peace bonds, etc.

In professional settings, ST is more likely to be viewed as a multi-purpose translation skill than a mode of interpreting (i.e. consecutive, simultaneous, whisper, relay, liaison, etc.) Many language service providers do not even mention ST as a service on their websites. During any interpreting assignment, however, certain written information in one form or another is usually made available to the interpreter, who might find it either helpful or distracting. While written scripts furnished in a conference may help ensure a more complete and accurate delivery of the interpretation (Lambert, 2004), they may also prove counter-productive to interpreters, who often find it cognitively burdensome to listen to the original speech and read the script at the same time (Agrifoglio, 2004).

Over the last few decades, multimedia presentations have become a major channel of disseminating information in any interpreting context. Speakers and presenters are supported by sophisticated PowerPoint presentations, densely-packed web pages, and social media sites full of highly descriptive emoticons and abbreviations. Interpreters in this media-rich world are thus required to demonstrate a multitude of capabilities characterized by instant comprehension, fast
reading skills, and a much shorter eye-to-voice span. Such requirements have implications for translator and interpreter training.

Current issues

Sight translation in T&I curricula

Many translation and interpretation programs around the world include ST as part of their curricula, with the emphasis ranging from a few classes at the beginning of a translation and/or interpretation course to a full course lasting for the entire semester (Ersozlu 2005; Zhan 2012). As ST involves oral output, incorporating this particular skill in interpreting courses certainly has its benefits in terms of developing quick reactions, thorough comprehension, and flexible oral skills among trainee interpreters. As noted above, some interpreters prefer not to have textual support when performing simultaneous interpreting (SI); but such interference may not be as significant in consecutive interpreting (CI), which involves taking notes while listening to the source speech and referring to those notes while rendering it into the target language. SI with text may be helpful, however, when the speaker is reading from a script at a high speed, which makes interpreting simultaneously more demanding and stressful. Textual support in this circumstance will certainly help interpreters produce a more complete rendition of a fast speech on the fly, as shown in Lambert (2004). Possessing the ability to perform SI with text will be a plus for interpreters in today’s industry, which is often characterized by fast speakers in a tightly-packed conference schedule.

Teaching sight skills in a translation class is also beneficial, as ST makes students more aware of the importance of prioritizing meaning over words, an ability that often takes a long time to acquire among trainee translators. The chunking skills required for performing ST are especially useful in helping students untangle long sentences with embedded clauses. In fact, many translators now produce the first draft of their work using ST and voice recognition software in conjunction with a word processor – a more efficient workflow for doing longer translation projects with a tight deadline.

Sight translation in professional environments

Whereas interpreters are usually provided with speeches in advance for a conference interpreting assignment, sight translators in courts and hospitals are often called upon to perform ST without any preparation at all. This may result in a hasty or simplified translation that can be risky in legal or medical settings (ALSINTL, 2012). For example, sometimes a written witness statement in a foreign language may contain words or expressions that an interpreter cannot understand immediately without consulting a dictionary (see Chapter 12 on court interpreting). Performing a sight translation on the spot without proper preparation generates unverifiable information that has legal implications. To avoid these issues, translation agencies usually recommend having all the required documents translated beforehand instead of relying on a hasty ST. This will ensure that the needed information presented in a foreign language is conveyed as accurately and completely as possible to its intended recipient (Legal Language Services, 2013).

The National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT) recommends that interpreters be allowed sufficient time to review the documents presented in court before ST is performed. The interpreter must possess a wide range of vocabulary and background knowledge of the information to be sight translated, demonstrate the ability to scan the document quickly and understand its main points, and produce an accurate interpretation of the document into
the target language (NAJIT, 2006). The New Jersey Judiciary is planning on implementing a regulation requiring that sufficient time be given to the court interpreter to assess a text message created on a mobile device before it can be faithfully and accurately sight translated (Mikkelson, 2013, personal communication). The interpreter has to make sure a text message is clear and short enough to be sight translated in court. The National Council on Interpreting in Health Care (NCIHC) states that ST should be used in medical settings on a limited basis; the content to be sight translated must not be too long or complicated in order not to overburden the patient or the interpreter (see Chapter 15 on healthcare interpreting). NCIHC also recommends that medical staff be present when ST is performed so as to answer any questions that the patient might have, and that documents with legal concerns should be professionally translated and then read to the patient by the interpreter to avoid mistranslation of high register legal terminology (NCIHC, 2009). The International Medical Interpreters Association (IMIA), on the other hand, acknowledges the useful and convenient tool of ST in facilitating communication between the hospital and the patient. It recommends that interpreters should be appropriately trained and required to demonstrate basic translation skills in order to sight translate texts not intended for publication (IMIA, 2009). The IMIA Guide on Medical Translation further recommends that a process for handling urgent translation needs, including ST, be established, and that an interpreter may be hired to sight translate information provided by patient in a foreign language, as long as the process is properly monitored and documented.

**Recommendations for practice**

*How research on sight translation informs translator and interpreter training*

Over the last two decades, many studies on ST have been published on a wide range of topics, including the cognitive constraints of ST, a quality comparison of ST and SI, ST’s role in interpreter training, course design, and how ST relates to interpreting and written translation. Although ST is not as widely researched as written translation and consecutive and simultaneous interpreting, its indispensable role in translator and interpreter training has been recognized and thoroughly studied in a number of dissertations at masters and doctoral levels (Huang, 2010; Hsu, 2009; Wan, 2005).

The fact that ST is performed with textual support may make it seem easier than traditional consecutive or simultaneous interpreting, which relies purely on aural input. The presence of messages written down in black and white during ST may give a false sense of confidence in comparison to the cognitive load of listening and full attention experienced in consecutive or a simultaneous interpreting. Many studies, however, suggest that ST is a more difficult task than CI or SI, due to the constant presence of the source text in the hand of the sight translator. Some professional interpreters often opt for listening rather than relying on visual input at the same time during simultaneous interpreting, simply because the two combined tasks tend to create a burdensome cognitive load. Agrifoglio (2004) indicates that ST can be as cognitively demanding as CI and SI, with visual interference being seemingly stronger than the audio interference found in CI and SI. With the source text in hand, interpreters may focus too much on reading and processing individual words rather than having a full comprehension of its meaning, which is required for any interpreting assignment.

In Gile’s (2009) Effort Model, SI involves listening (L), production (P), short-term memory (M), and coordination (C), while ST is a two-phase process consisting of reading (R) and production (P). In this theoretical construct, ST can be considered a skill involving less effort than SI. Agrifoglio (2004), however, presents the opposite view, echoing Mikkelson et al. (1995) in
saying that the cognitive demand associated with ST is on a par with that of CI or SI. Agrifoglio argues that the main difficulty of ST lies in the physical presence of the source text in its entire process, which tends to be more distracting than the non-physical, aural input of CI or SI. The existence of the source text is also cited by Agrifoglio as one of the reasons why it can be very difficult to maintain a steady and fluent delivery of the output in an ST assignment. Her study shows that short-term memory during ST is still needed for storing the various sentence structures that the translator has produced; the more the syntax of the source text differs from that of the target text, the higher the load on the short-term memory. Agrifoglio thus suggests that proper marking of the key words and chunking of the meaning units should be made on the source text as the sight translator prepares for the delivery. Gile (2009) recommends using slashes to segment long and complex embedded structures into smaller chunks for easier processing.

Experiments carried out by Shreve et al. (2010 and 2011) show that the structure of the source text is disruptive to the mental process of the sight translator, and visual interference is created as a result of the presence of the source text during ST. These two constraints, in conjunction with the time pressure imposed on the sight translator, make the task cognitively more demanding than written translation. The expected end results of these constraints are errors, deficiencies, and disfluency in ST. In Shreve et al. (2010), a “shallow-scan hypothesis” is proposed to explain the side effects of the source text’s presence during ST, namely the translator’s inability to perform deep processing of the source text due to the need for the eyes to repeatedly scan its surface structure back and forth.

The pedagogical implications of the studies above highlight the importance of teaching the following skills in a sight translation class: (1) focusing on meaning, not words, (2) proper identification of key words and segmentation of meaning units in the preparation process, and (3) developing the ability to read ahead.

**How sight translation relates to written translation**

Some studies call for the integration of ST into the curriculum of written translation, particularly with more frequent use of ST in producing the first draft of a translation work. Experiments in Dragsted and Hansen (2009) reveal significant disparity in the number of words produced per minute by interpreters performing ST, translators doing ST, and translators doing written translation: 142, 74, and 17 respectively. The lower productivity in the written translation, unexpectedly, does not yield better translation quality than that produced by the other two groups of translators and interpreters.

Dragsted and Hansen (2009) compare the three translation outcomes by looking at keystroke logging, eye tracking, and quality rating results in the translation process. They observe that interpreters process the source text segments in a more sequential manner, dealing with one component after another, while translators tend to move their eyes back and forth on the computer screen searching for clues to help process the current segment of information they are working on. Pause analysis of the three groups shows that interpreters tend to demonstrate more confidence in performing ST, with more fluent delivery and fewer pauses. In contrast, written translators hesitate more frequently when working on written translation, even to the extent of pausing before typing every word. Though hesitating less often, those written translators performing ST still show a much higher frequency of pauses than interpreters. Gorszczynska (2010) supports the idea of integrating sight and written translation, citing the benefits of reducing time of translation, making the process more effective, speeding up the transfer of information, and lowering translation costs.
It is thus logical to recommend the use of ST and voice recognition software in the written translation process to obtain the first draft quickly for editing and polishing by the translator in the next phase of the work cycle. The studies above also suggest that translators with training in ST and voice recognition software may be more effective than those who have not received this training. ST skills combined with speech technology may help translators to focus more on meaning rather than words, and produce translation more effectively for the faster workflow required in today’s market.

**How sight translation relates to interpreter training**

With its end product being an oral output, ST has long been associated with interpreter training as a tool to comprehend the source text quickly and to deal with information in chunks. In CI and SI curricula, ST is often taught in the first few classes to familiarize students with the basic skills needed in an interpreting setting (Ersozlü, 2005; Agrifoglio, 2004). Based on Gile’s (2009) Effort Model for ST, which involves only reading and reproduction, Wan (2005) proposes an expanded model that includes reading, memory, coordination, and reproduction. The two additional components (memory and coordination) also play a crucial role in CI and SI. Wan’s experiment confirms that consecutive students with certain level of ST training outperform those without ST training in the areas of information prioritizing, parsing of messages, accuracy of delivery, and dealing with long sentences. From a cognitive perspective, Wan’s study shows that ST training significantly benefits consecutive students and helps them acquire the aforementioned skills.

From the standpoint of cognitive psychology, Jiménez Ivars (2008) considers ST as a mode of interpreting and suggests that it is a more difficult task to perform than written translation and other modes of interpretation. According to Jiménez Ivars, the challenges associated with ST include comprehension of the source text, lack of immediate access to translation equivalents, insufficient skills to read ahead, source text constraints, and misreading. In addition, the number of problem-solving strategies used during ST is almost twice the number adopted in written translation – a clear indication that ST is cognitively more demanding than written translation. These challenges should be addressed pedagogically to prepare students for performing ST more effectively.

Experiments carried out by Lambert (2004) show that ST and SI with Text (SIT) yield much higher grades of translation quality than traditional SI without text. The results indicate that having textual support in the interpretation process helps to ensure a more thorough and accurate translation. During ST and SIT, the interpreter has the opportunity to glance through the script quickly in advance, obtaining the required prior knowledge to provide a better interpreting service on site. It may therefore be advisable to teach ST and the related chunking skills in the beginning of an SI course. Practising SI with text is also helpful in mastering split attention, another crucial skill for performing simultaneous interpreting.

**Pedagogical innovation in sight translation training**

From a professional point of view, a successful ST performance depends on two factors: comprehension of the source text and the ability to produce clear and fluent delivery. This skill set entails a number of capabilities, including public speaking, reading ahead, analysis of the source text, parsing and chunking of information, sentence completion, paraphrasing skills, the ability to expand and condense, register manipulation, producing the target language version quickly, domain knowledge, and understanding cultural nuances (González et al., 2012; Lee, 2012; Wan, 2005). Many of the studies described below are designed to help students of ST acquire these capabilities.
The authors of one of the first textbooks on English-Chinese ST, Qin and He (2009), emphasize synchronicity of speed and syntactic order between the source and the target texts when training for SI with text. Maintaining a parallel speed with the source speech ensures that the interpreter provides a thorough translation without major omissions. On the other hand, maintaining a synchronized syntactic order allows the interpreter to parse the source speech effectively into smaller meaning units that are easier to tackle, thus freeing the interpreter from having to restructure the source text and reducing cognitive constraints at the same time.

Considering ST as a special variant of simultaneous interpreting, Zhan (2012) emphasizes the importance of teaching sequential translation skills (i.e., translate along without major structural changes) as the core pedagogical activity in an ST class. His course design for ST centres on how the skill of translation in sequence is actually used in the professional market. The main components in Zhan’s ST class include drills for sequential translation, basic ST exercises (chunking, addition, simplification, reverse translation, etc.), ST with source text, ST with target text (for training in following the speaker and reading the prepared translation), ST with source summary or PowerPoint (PPT), and mock conferences. These exercises are designed to immerse students in a real-world setting of ST, with various activities to familiarize them with fundamental ST skills, such as simultaneous reading and translating, accuracy, proper phrasing, and structural transfer.

Lee (2012) compares professional and trainee interpreters in the areas of accuracy, target language expression, and delivery quality. She finds that student interpreters lag behind their professional counterparts in all of the three areas listed above. The skills required for ST and identified in Lee (2012) include reading comprehension, ability to differentiate key and ancillary ideas, avoiding source language interference, speed reading, quick response, avoiding redundant translation, developing chunking strategies, and condensing source information. Čeňková (2010) emphasizes the importance of chunking skills in ST. Her skill set for ST also includes fast retrieval of verbs, key words, and numbers in the source text, numbering various components when restructuring a long sentence, filtering out secondary information, speedy transfer of meaning, parsing long and complex sentences, fluent delivery, and avoiding repetition and unnecessary shift. In Ersozlu (2005), six major skills for ST at undergraduate level are identified, namely fast reading and comprehension, domain knowledge, detailed reading, dealing with unknown words, chunking skills, and meaning retention. These skills are essential for ensuring accuracy, coherence, and fluency in ST. Ersozlu also recommends using those text types and documents that actually need to be sight translated in the real world, including hand-written or poorly-written documents, texts with charts and graphics, user manuals, journal papers, and texts with topics covering economy, trade, science and technology, medicine, environmental protection, computing, politics, patent, law, etc., all tied to carefully-designed exercises to enhance the students’ ST skills.

Using PowerPoint software to present source text content, Song (2010) trains students to work under time pressure during ST. Each page of the PPT file has a pre-determined number of words displayed for a specific duration (in seconds) set by the trainer. Students are trained within these constraints to quickly identify meaning units in the source text, learn how to separate long sentences into small chunks, and gradually acquire the spontaneous, real-time information-processing skills needed for performing simultaneous interpreting. According to Song, timed ST exercises using PPT is an ideal, transitional tool to prepare students for SI training. It benefits students by training them in quick comprehension, developing working memory, strengthening split attention, and laying a solid foundation for developing the appropriate ear-voice span (EVS) required for SI.

Originally used in the theoretical study of translational features, corpus technology has just become the latest entrant in the toolbox for teaching ST. Chen (2012, 2013) has developed a
set of corpora for his Chinese-English ST class at the postgraduate level. The pedagogical tool has four components: Translation Learners’ Corpus (TLC), Corpus of English Speeches (CES), Corpus of Comment Tags (CCT), and Chinese-English Parallel Corpus of Speeches (CEPCS). TLC is a platform for ST students to learn from each other. CES provides access to idiomatic expressions in English speeches for students who are non-native speakers of English. CCT demonstrates those challenges and difficulties commonly found in students’ ST work. CEPCS helps students deal with translating cultural-specific terms from Chinese into English. Chen (2013) observes from CCT that the challenges commonly found in students’ ST assignments include phraseology, syntax, backtracking, omissions, and redundant translation. Corresponding exercises can be designed to assist trainee interpreters in dealing with the challenges found in CCT.

Future directions

As written translation, sight translation and short consecutive interpretation involve different linguistic skills and are in great demand in the healthcare industry, the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care (NCIHC) recommends the use of different providers specifically trained for each of the three services. According to the NCIHC (2009), not all translators or interpreters are able to provide all the three services required in a hospital, and interpreters may often be expected to provide sight and/or written translation. It therefore suggests that translation and interpretation (T&i) training programs should include assessment of literacy levels in their admissions process, requiring the prospective students, for example, to write an essay in each of the two working languages. As it is recommended that the content to be sight translated for patients be short, informational, and semi-technical, NCIHC (2009) recommends that the training materials for sight translators in the area of healthcare should be limited to those of this nature, such as hospital signage, discharge instructions, and basic nutritional guidelines. Trainees in written translation, on the other hand, should be exposed to working on longer and more complicated texts, such as consent forms and advance directives.

In other areas of the profession, it is a common practice for a translator or an interpreter to be asked to provide comprehensive services in written translation, sight translation and interpretation. As discussed earlier, ST is found to be beneficial for both the practice of and training in translation and interpretation. An ideal curriculum design for T&i would thus emphasize ST in the training of both translators and interpreters. At the undergraduate level, for instance, a course in ST can be as long as a whole year to train students in the areas of comprehension, quick response, language transfer, identification of meaning units, parsing and chunking, accuracy, and phraseology. At the graduate level, emphasis can be placed on incorporating ST into both translation and interpreting courses so that students can benefit from the written sophistication and oral dexterity that the skill of ST relies upon.

With the currently available corpus technology, the teaching of ST can be technically enhanced by building genre-specific parallel and comparable corpora (see Zanettin, 2012) for providing convenient access to unfamiliar terms and expressions. Corpora also make a dynamic research tool for translation and interpreting students to enrich their learning experience and build up their background knowledge.

Looking ahead, sight translators should be trained and prepared for handling translation of messages on social media such as Facebook or Twitter. The widely used PowerPoint presentations in conferences, seminars, and exhibitions often contain instant messages quoted from social media sites and various websites. Information in these media tends to be out of context, abridged, personal, esoteric, or even hastily written, and can be presented in the forms of abbreviation, emoticons, or any random characters. Future sight translators should be equipped
with an even more dynamic skill set that encompasses not only trendy terminology and up-to-date views of the world, but also dexterity, domain knowledge, resourcefulness, concise and precise translation, and constant pursuit of professionalism.

**Further reading**


This experimental research describes sight translation by comparing it to simultaneous and consecutive interpreting, with a view to identifying particular constraints and problems of each mode.


The authors report on a comparative study of written translation and sight translation, and suggest that working in the oral (sight) modality seems to have a lot to offer in terms of saving time and effort without compromising the output quality of written translation.


This paper aims to lay a groundwork for teaching sight translation at undergraduate level, based on concepts and strategies of skill training using step-by-step exercises.


This article discusses the design of an experiment investigating whether sight translation can effectively reduce the completion time of the written translation process without compromising the quality of the TL text, thus streamlining and lowering the cost of the communication between text authors and the readers.


This study compares sight translation, sight interpretation and simultaneous interpretation, and concludes that visual exposure to the source text may help the student perform simultaneous interpretation.

**References**


TRANSCRIPTION AND TRANSLATION

Carmen Valero-Garcés

Introduction

Within the field of translation and interpreting studies, the literature produced on the subject of transcription has been less than extensive for research purposes, despite its importance in the professional arena (trials, police wiretaps, language learning, research). There are also a great number of disciplines (applied linguistics, second language teaching, ethnography, ethnomethodology, anthropology) which use transcripts of conversations or documents for their studies.

The aim of this chapter is twofold: on the one hand, to examine the theoretical and practical issues involved in transcribing and translating for different purposes (forensic, medical, research, business) and, on the other hand, to explore some applications in different fields (information, journalism, second language teaching and learning, interpreting and translation, training).

First, as a brief introduction, I will provide some basic definitions of the main concepts, and outline the skills needed to create transcripts. I will also discuss different types of transcripts and their uses; secondly, some notes on early developments in the field of transcription and translation (TR&tl) will follow; thirdly a more detailed description of some of the most representative uses of TR&tl will be explored; finally, some advances and new directions in TR&tl, a result of the increasing number of recorded conversations that require transcription/translation for different purposes, will be mentioned.

Main concepts, skills, uses and types

The term ‘transcription’ can have different meanings. The *Oxford English Dictionary* includes two entries:

Transcribe. Verb [with object]

1 put (thoughts, speech, or data) into written or printed form: each interview was taped and transcribed

2 transliterate (foreign characters) or write or type out (shorthand, notes, or other abbreviated forms) into ordinary characters or full sentences: the court was adjourned so that they could transcribe their notes.
Hatim and Munday (2004: 351) define transcription as a “Translation that retains the form of the ST [source text] item in the TT [target text], frequently used for names”. For our purposes, TR&tl refers to the process of converting oral discourse to written form and translating the results.

Considering the skills needed for TR&tl, as with sight translation (see Chapter 9 for sight translation), transcription and translation is a hybrid and complex activity involving both interpreting and translating skills. It requires some level of innate ability, but also requires a high level of proficiency in both the source and target languages, superior listening and comprehension skills, the ability to understand the speaker’s perspective and to accurately render such perspective into the target language, the ability to concentrate, familiarity with the cultures involved, experience in listening to undercover recordings and oral wire intercepts, and several non-linguistic skills, including, but not limited to, analytical skills, knowledge of protocols and familiarity with the use of transcription equipment, transcription protocols, models and conventions, and the purposes of the transcription/translation.

As for the uses for transcripts, they are also diverse and interconnected. In this chapter the focus will be on the following:

- Research and the development of different forms of corpora for different purposes.
- Teaching and learning of foreign languages, providing assistance and reinforcement in native language study or the creation of educational materials, or curriculum design.
- Media and entertainment, especially as relates to audiovisual translation (AVT), within which we could include subtitling in the general sense, but also other varieties such as: complete or partial film subtitling, live translation during performances (opera, theatre), subtitling for the deaf or for the visually impaired (see also Chapter 18 for media interpreting).
- Forensic applications, which involve the transcription and translation of any recording used as evidence in the courts or even during the investigative process.

All in all, TR&tl serves different purposes and is important not only for interpreters or translators as part of their work or specialization, but also for historians, anthropologists, journalists, judges, and many others.

In terms of the methodology, there is no agreement on which process to follow. Two methods are most typical:

- transcribe the text in the source language (SL) and then translate to the target language text (TT).
- transcribe the TT directly.

Choosing one or the other depends on several factors, such as the expertise of the transcriber/translator, the purpose of the assignment, or issues involving time or profit, among others.

There are also two modes of transcription, whether we are referring to a transcript produced in the SL or a translation:

- Phonetic/phonological transcription
- Orthographic transcription or transliteration, which in turn can be broken down into orthographic transcription in itself, and discursive transcription (which is considered, in some circles, to be a mode which exists apart and independently).

Phonetic/phonological transcription provides a faithful rendering of pronunciation and tends to be important in certain cases, for example when there are sociolinguistic aspects present in the
speaker’s speech, when the speaker is foreign, or when the speaker exhibits characteristics of pathological speech.

In the case of orthographic transcription or transliteration, transcription which is merely orthographic, or transliteration, can exhibit different degrees of precision and provides an account of the language used by the speaker. Discursive transcription focuses on aspects which are pragmatic in nature and reveals details of the interaction which would go unnoticed by the ordinary listener. Some elements to bear in mind are, for example, pauses, silences, overlaps, extensions, restarts, prosodic ups and downs, whispered speech, etc. It involves the literal transcription of recordings. This means that all elements, both linguistic and extralinguistic, must be transcribed and attention must be paid to different levels of language (spelling, lexicon, syntax, pragmatic aspects), along with sounds which normally go unnoticed, or words and sounds such as stuttering, false starts, small talk, the ring of a telephone, car alarms, etc. This type of transcription is often carried out for legal purposes and, in such cases, is considered forensic. In contrast, when it is carried out for business purposes or for certain investigations, summary transcription or meaning-focused transcription is preferred, which focuses uniquely on the meaning of the utterance.

All of the above-mentioned elements of speech are represented using symbols. However, there is no internationally accepted system, but rather many different systems, each with its own conventions of transcription, which reflect diverse aspects of the interaction. The majority of these systems are based on the so-called Jefferson Method (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974; Jefferson, 1987), a method developed within the framework of ethnomethodology and American conversational analysis. This method reflects diverse elements of the interaction (e.g., turns of speech, overlaps, consecutive interjections from the participants).

There have been several attempts at developing systems of transcription. The generally accepted requirements that a transcript must meet are:

- Neutrality or a faithful rendering so that the transcript will not be subjective
- Thoroughness or completeness, including all elements which appear as part of the oral speech in their totality
- Omnifunctionality, allowing for different uses and applications
- Clarity, both from the standpoint of learning the system and in terms of the legibility of the rendering
- Universality of compatibility with different software or computer systems
- Sparing use of symbols that are clear, simple, unambiguous, and compatible with standardized international systems

These systems are often based on or implement digital transcription software programs such as CHILDES, SALT, CLAN, EXMARaLDA, TRANSANA, or PerLA. These programs include rules for the use of capital and lowercase letters, the transcription of numerical sequences and letters, and the use of punctuation marks. Procedures are also established for transcribing pronunciation errors, unintelligible words, word fragments, elisions, and non-verbal acoustic events such as “full pauses”, noise from the speakers, steady background noise in the recording, or intermittent sounds.

The creation of transcription software is without a doubt a great step in the field of digital TR&tl. This software contains systems of concepts, data formats, and tools for the computer-assisted transcription and annotation of spoken language. They can be used with different operating systems, and some allow for data exchange with other systems and for segmentation of transcription data according to several transcription conventions.
Choosing between phonetic/phonological transcription and orthographic transcription depends on the purpose that the transcription will serve. Some experts in speech analysis (Duranti 1997; Jefferson 1987; Atkinson and Heritage 1984) point out the dilemma that exists between expressing the “what” and the “how”. In other words, they point out the conflict between orthographic representation alone, which ignores variants in language, or more extensive representation that takes possible deviations in meaning into account. In addition, the quality of the audio and intelligibility of speech are other factors which can influence the method chosen.

**Historical perspectives on transcription and translation**

Without going into too much depth, 20th century history reveals that as early as World War I, in what were then called war ministries, there were those who worked intercepting enemy communications, which were then transcribed into their own language. Often, these same individuals created propaganda; sending oral and written messages in the enemy language with the intention of swaying the opinion of the civilian population. Many of the translators and interpreters that worked in the League of Nations carried out assignments of this kind (see Chapter 1 for more on the history of interpreting).

Interceptions of messages by “eavesdroppers”, who understood the language and transferred it to the language of their “homeland” were also extremely common during the Second World War. Some famous interpreters, like Hans Jacob (a German Jew) or André Kaminker (French), hosted radio programs from Boston and London, respectively, to broadcast propaganda against the Nazis and their supporters. It is also known that during the Nazi regime, there was even an organized translation service which grew to include 30 languages and which was created in order to produce news propaganda, both in print and on film (personal conversation with former UN interpreter, May 2010).

After the war, another important development in the use of transcripts was the news coverage of the Nuremberg Trials, which was transmitted in several languages. As we all know, these proceedings are to a great extent responsible for putting the interpreting profession on the map, thanks in part to the transcription of the events into other languages as they occurred during the trial (see Chapters 1 and 5).

We can also find references made to transcripts by Soviet interpreters during the so-called “Cold War”. These interpreters would write reports to send to their supervisors, based upon notes they had taken during certain conversations in which they had taken part. In these references, they sometimes mentioned how they feared they were being recorded by microphones in the rooms and, in fact, according to the personal comments made by one United Nations interpreter, they used to speak in low voices to avoid being overheard. Another example of the value and power of transcripts can be found in the comments made by Cuban interpreters during a mission to certain Asian countries regarding the presence of microphones in rooms for the purpose of translating the conversations into other languages (personal conversation with former UN interpreter, May 2010).

The standard form of recording speech throughout the 20th century was stenographic transcription (using different types of machines, depending on the country and language), where the stenographers (who were typically later replaced by tachygraphers) would listen to what was said and then write it down on paper. The use of taped recordings to make transcripts is far more recent and did not come into consistent use until the 1970s. Nowadays, recordings of live sessions of numerous organizations (e.g. the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council) are still used for transcription, although the tendency is to record digitally using an
optical disc, or to use voice recognition and data processing computer programs to render transcriptions.

At the present time, both national and international security agencies make transcripts from “tapped” telephone conversations, which are generally ordered or authorized by a judge to be used in the pursuit of crimes such as drug trafficking and international terrorism.

In fact, there is an increasing number of private companies devoted to transferring spoken content (from audio or audiovisual recordings) to written transcripts using voice recognition computer programs. However, where “sensitive”, security-related content is involved, this task is usually carried out by the translators and interpreters employed by security agencies.

**Current trends and uses of transcription and translation**

This section will examine some of the most representative uses of TR&tl in different fields: research in corpora, language teaching and learning, media and entertainment, and legal settings.

**Research**

One of the most direct applications of transcription in research is found in the creation of oral corpora (spoken language corpora), which can serve numerous purposes and which use different systems of transcription. The purpose of the oral corpora is to gather a large quantity of electronic data which, in general, are adapted according to the objectives of the different transcription systems described above.

Computer-assisted transcription and translation is one of the most direct applications in the construction and analysis of electronic spoken language corpora. Listerri (1996) mentions three kinds of oral corpora: (1) Phonetic and phonological inventory, (2) oral corpora for the development of technological applications and (3) the so-called “spoken language corpus”. Each one of these three research perspectives influences the kind of speech sample collected, the setting, the recording (natural or controlled setting), and the kind of transcription and translation. In general, oral corpora that are represented in writing can be summarized in three ways:

1. Orthographic adaptation
2. Differential coding and labelling
3. A combination of orthography and typography meant to represent the reality of conversation.

What follows is an example taken from the CREA (*Corpus de referencia del español actual*) which uses one of the most extensive systems of coding and labelling, the TEI (*Text Encoding Initiative*). This enables the labelling of a broad range of samples through the use of established criteria used in the transcription of many modern corpora. The CREA enables the spoken language corpus to be accessed in two ways: through orthographic rendering alone or through rendering with additional marks. The following example serves as an illustration:

Droga? Es un tema tabú, tío. ¿Sí? Eso es complicadísimo. fuimos, y estuvimos desde que llegamos hasta el cuarto día o así no maría. Y luego la la siguiente vez también fue complicadísimo. Fue ¿Pero no se vende por la calle y tal? Pues no no no.

*Drugs? That’s a taboo thing, man. Right? That’s really complicated. We went and we were there from the time we got there until the fourth day or so no maría. And then the next time too was super complicated. He was all But isn’t that sold in the street and all that? Well no no no it isn’t.* (the author’s translation).
Using these codes offers certain advantages such as a precise search engine, rapid location of phenomena and quantification of data, as well as interchangeability and "reusability", given the compatibility sought between computing systems and the increasingly widespread agreement among the research community regarding their use.

This said, electronic corpora also present some disadvantages:

1. This type of transliteration does not take into account other prosodic elements linked to spoken language, such as the length of pauses, overlaps in speech, etc. These elements may be necessary depending on the purpose of the transcription.
2. The marks which are used can impede or hinder the reading of the text and obligate the reader to read the text according to a two-tiered process: the orthographic text on one hand and on the other, the additional coded metatext.
3. The transcribers are not always specialists, and transcriptions are often assigned to interns, postgraduate students, or research project staff, which is why there is a broad margin for subjective interpretation and few clear guidelines.

As for the use of transcripts in research, the process of obtaining and analysing data is usually as follows: the setting and participants are described, then recordings of naturally-occurring encounters are made, and finally, the transcript is provided and then translated. If there are any problems regarding the more mechanical aspects involved in producing the transcript, especially in the case of distant languages or cultures such as the Chinese, Russian, or Arabic languages, comments to that effect might be included.

The scientific process of transcription involves the use of software and professional audio equipment and is usually performed in a laboratory setting where the transcriber can listen without distractions. Digital recording devices are far more common than analogue devices and facilitate the tasks of saving, copying, and loading the audio files during the transcription process. These devices allow a wide variety of methods to be employed and can even be used to decipher speech which is only marginally intelligible. These methods include the modification of reproduction speed, amplification, and the use of audio filters to minimize unwanted frequencies and enable the transcriber to focus on a speaker’s syntactic, lexical, phonological, or discursive elements. The use of this electronic equipment saves time and money, and of course adds fidelity to the source text. Advances in computer-assisted transcription technology and
software (e.g., FOLKER, ELAN, TRANSANA) have been extremely helpful in simplifying a
tedious, repetitive, and mentally exhausting process.

Transcription is also used for other research-related activities such as the recording and
transcription of different types of conversations in diverse fields of study ranging from applied
linguistics to ethnography and interpreting and translation studies.

Evidence of the broadened use of transcription in Translation and Interpreting Studies can
be found in the high percentage of empirical research based on data obtained from authentic
recorded speech, which is collected and later analysed and transcribed using the fundamentals
of discourse analysis and conversation analysis methodology as a frame of reference. Typically, a
statement is included which declares that any personal details mentioned in the transcribed
speech have been altered to maintain participants’ anonymity. One need only look at the
collection of published articles from the most recent Critical Link conferences (2005 and 2007)
to verify this assertion and to find examples of how transcripts are used to analyse the role of
the interpreter, or examples from studies on dialogue interpreting taken from different areas,
such as television interviews and talk shows (Straniero-Sergio 1999; Wadensjö 2006), or
from business interactions (see Garzone 2002; Fogazzaro and Gavioli 2004; Gavioli and
Maxwell 2007).

The use of TR&tl in language teaching and learning

The use of TR&tl in language teaching and learning is also a long-recognized area which is quite
productive and fruitful. TR&tl is used to transcribe dialogues or summarize oral texts from one
language into another, or to create subtitles designed specifically as a didactic tool for the teaching
and learning of foreign languages. Thus, in the case of subtitles for example, Dollerup (1974)
highlights the didactic value of interlingual subtitles as a language learning tool used in Denmark;
Duff (1989) writes about the use of mother language and translation in foreign language learning;
and Schäffner (2002) emphasizes the influence of discourse analysis in translator training. These
are examples of the many theoreticians that have stressed that having access to the original and
being able to compare it with its translation is a very useful tool.

One of the first examples of TR&tl was the collection of English language film videos with
English subtitles entitled Speak Up, produced by Columbia Tristar Video in the 1990s. In Spain,
in 2002, the newspaper El País produced, in collaboration with Disney, the collection Diviértete
con el inglés [Have fun with English], a collection of classics from Disney in their original English
format with English subtitles, designed so that young people could become familiar with the
English language in an enjoyable way. In France, Channel 5 has for many years been broad-
casting some of its programs in French with subtitles in French in order to promote the learning
of the language.

In all of these cases, it is quite common to find three or more lines full of lexical repetition
and incomplete sentences, exclamation marks and spellings that are closer to a literal transcription,
as well as word for word translation of dialogues requiring a certain reading speed.

A consolidation of this practice as a didactic tool came with the arrival of the DVD, as it
allows different tracks with transcription and translation in subtitles in different languages, thus
promoting transcription and interlingual translation. Nowadays the Internet offers many other
possibilities (e.g., subtitling live events, audio description).

Another new direction taken in this field is the use of subtitles for students with disabilities,
mainly for the deaf and hearing-impaired. A good example is the book by Romero-Fresco
(2011), Subtitling through Speech Recognition: Respeaking. Respeaking is considered to be a special
form of oral transcription. It refers to the production of subtitles through speech recognition.
Although the book does not focus directly on transcription and translation, some of the topics covered can be useful or relevant for TR&tl. They include topics such as the different methods used to produce live subtitles and the training and professional practice of respeaking around the world, the development of skills required before, during and after the respeaking process, and an analysis of the reception of respeaking.

TR&tl offers great educational potential to people with limited knowledge of a country’s languages or for those with certain disabilities, but in the multilingual and multicultural societies in which we live, it can also be of help to immigrants or children in maintaining their mother tongues in foreign countries or even in their own countries, or in learning new languages in the case of students who are not fluent in a given language. An example can be found in the studies by Jan-Louis Kruger (2012) regarding the use of transcripts in native languages in South Africa or in English to teach students who are not proficient in English.

These areas are still underdeveloped and have only been addressed by a small group of authors, but we must recognize that this is, in fact, a direction that could be taken in the future in the fields of language teaching and learning and TR&tl.

**TR&tl in the mass media and entertainment/business setting**

Another use for transcription and translation is found in social media – especially in audiovisual communication. This can serve a wide range of objectives: informative, commercial or for entertainment – in films, reports, news, interviews, advertisements, etc. – in which we see increasingly more translation and transcription of oral messages. AVT might be considered a transcription technique which is subject to a series of specific norms and in which the type of transcription used ranges from orthographic transcription (interviews), which permits no variation, to summary transcription (parliamentary speeches), to phonological adaptation (film subtitling).

The entertainment market also uses transcription extensively in the form of AVT. Karaoke, movies and all sort of programs use subtitling, whether intra or interlingual, involving transcription which adheres to different conventions depending on the purpose. This is almost always restricted to the more spoken or influential languages such as English, French, German, and Spanish. One example of a film which combines different transcription conventions and languages is the Spanish film *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, which is sold on DVD with two interlingual tracks in English and a further two in German. Of these two, one is for the hearing population and the other for the deaf and hearing-impaired.

It is also a fact that TR&tl is needed in bilingual geographical areas such as Belgium, with its Walloon and Flemish communities, or in Finland, in Swedish and Finnish, or in Israel or Jordan, where Hebrew and Arabic are spoken or in Spain, where Catalanian and Spanish co-exist. In these areas, AVT is extensively used and many technological advances have occurred within this field.

According to Diaz-Cintas (2003), subtitling as one of the main forms of AVT may be defined as a translation practice that consists of presenting a written text, generally on the lower part of the screen, that endeavours to recount the original dialogue of the speakers, as well as the discursive elements that appear in the image (letters, inserts, graffiti, inscriptions, placards, and the like), and the information that is contained on the soundtrack (songs, voices off camera).

In some circles, subtitling is not considered translation proper because of all the spatial and temporal limitations imposed by the medium itself, which impact the end result considerably, and some practitioners prefer instead to talk about “adaptation”. Nor can it be considered transcription, for similar reasons. However, if a more dynamic and open perspective
is taken in defining translation studies, one which allows the inclusion of new realities (sign language interpretation, multimedia translation, post-editing), transcription in subtitling might be considered another special field within translation studies which deserves more attention. From this perspective, subtitling as a hybrid, where sound and images interact and oral speech is transferred into a written text or transcript, could be considered a kind of transcription and translation.

Another well-known form of AVT which involves TR&tl is dubbing, which consists of the substitution of the voices of the actors shown on the screen with those of different performers speaking another language. There are also other forms, such as voice-over, partial-dubbing, narration and interpreting, the translation of live performance, subtitling for the opera and the theatre, subtitling for the deaf and hearing-impaired (SDH), and audio description for the blind or visually impaired (AD). All of these practices use transcription and translation at some stage and therefore involve the conversion of an oral text into a written one. The only difference may lie in the intended audience. Díaz-Cintas (2003: 13), referring to these new and innovative professional activities, considers that whether the hurdle is language or a sensorial barrier, the aim of the translation process is exactly the same: to facilitate access to an otherwise hermetic source of information and entertainment. In this way accessibility becomes a common denominator that underpins these practices, as is the case with TR&tl.

These practices are also being affected by the use of computer games and interactive software programs, and subtitling and TR&tl, albeit indirectly, are shifting closer to localization, since these games are not only subtitled, but also adapted to the cultural sensibilities of the target gamers. These new trends are representative of a broader move: different forms of audiovisual translation and other translation modes are converging, creating hybrid forms and sometimes catering to very diverse, but well-defined target audiences. The translator also has to face different methods of TR&tl:

- Pre-prepared subtitles (or offline subtitling) where complete sentences are first produced and later reduced, translated and adapted;
- Live or real-time subtitles (or online subtitling) where the transcription is first human-made and then the translation (and subtitling) is machine-translated.

In the first type the translator has plenty of time to perform their work, whereas the online type is live. The tendency in the latter situation is to use voice recognition: A person dictates the speech into a microphone connected to a computer using a speech recognition program that converts speech into written text. However, the relatively high number of spelling mistakes that make it to the screen means that input from human beings – say, trained transcribers and translators – is still necessary. In any case it is a complex activity involving complicated mental processes, time constraints, and takes much effort to coordinate.

Continuing with this open-minded approach, “fansubs” also involve transcription and translation in the sense that an oral message is rendered into written text. The philosophy underlying this type of AVT is the free distribution over the Internet of audiovisual programmes with subtitles done by fans. The translation is done for free by fans of these programs and then posted on the Internet so that anyone who is interested may read them. From an academic point of view, not much research has been done on this activity done by fans for fans (Díaz Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez 2006), but it is, together with those mentioned before, a new form of converting oral texts into written ones and moving from one language to another. This contrasts with the more traditional types of transcribing and translating, such as forensic transcription and translation, which are explained below.
Forensic transcription and translation

Forensic transcription and translation (FTT) is a long-used but also somewhat unknown application, and one that, despite its importance, has not received much attention.

FTT is the process of transcribing and translating audio/video recordings of speech from foreign language speaking individuals for use as evidentiary material in the legal process. It is a two-part process consisting of: (1) a verbatim orthographic transcript of an evidentiary recording, and (2) the transcript’s conceptually verbatim translation into other language.

In other words, FTT entails an accurate, unaltered, and complete translation reproducing all the linguistic, paralinguistic, and pragmatic meaning of the speakers in any (source) language exactly, or as close to exactly as possible, producing a legally equivalent translation.

Transcription conventions, as already pointed out, are not universal and the purpose may also be different. Nevertheless, it is commonly accepted that the manner in which the transcript – and subsequently the translation – is prepared must involve as little interference from the transcriber as possible. These means that the transcriber and translator must be familiar with and able to use some conventions that are part of generally accepted practice and which help to solve the transcription and translation issues as they arise.

The variety of texts that can be considered forensic and the characteristics of these texts is remarkable and can range from formal texts to non-grammatical texts, full of idiomatic expressions, fixed expressions, idiolects or jargon used by small social groups, or slang. Any conversation used as evidence falls within the forensic classification. Some examples are suspect interrogations, witness statements, secret recordings, general conversations, phone calls, calls to the police, etc.

As Palma (2004, n.p.) states: “We [The translators] have to balance the rigidity of legal translation with the leniency of literary translation, to arrive at a solution that is accurate in every sense. Otherwise we run the risk of providing nonsensical literal translations that totally distort the original message.” She gives the example of the translation “no tengo ni un kilo en el bolsillo” to “I don’t even have a kilo in my pocket” instead of “I don’t have a single penny in my pocket”.

Literature on FTT is less than extensive. But most practitioners recognize that FTT is a very complex task, and as Palma (2004, n.p.) adds: “I find that translating a tape transcript is both frightening and exhilarating. This is the only instance in which we have ‘permission’ to move away from the severity a courtroom imposes, and explore the depths of language use and human communication. When a Colombian says ‘¿qué más?’, is it ‘what else?’ or ‘how you doin’? When a Dominican says ‘dímelo, tigraso’, is he actually talking to someone called ‘tigraso’ [big tiger], or is he saying something more akin to ‘talk to me, big guy’.”

On the other hand, there are different levels of forensic linguistic analysis that require different kinds of transcription. These levels are:

- Graphemic, useful in transcribing characters from different alphabets.
- Phonetic and phonological, useful for example in the case of commercial brands where the name/sounds could be deceptive or false.
- Morphological, useful in identifying different dialects or the word composition of commercial brands.
- Syntactical, useful for the analysis of syntactic structures and sentences used in contracts or in the case of identifying authorship or plagiarism, for example.
- Semantic, necessary in many lawsuits over brands or copyrights, for example in McDonald’s use of the calque Mc-inexpensive.
Pragmatic, useful for identifying messages in context, inferences, or an author’s intention, which would be lost if translated out of context. Examples include the meaning of “vale” in Spanish or “right” in English at certain times and within different contexts.

Functions of speech such as offering, asking, apologizing, saying goodbye, and accepting, for example, in cases involving bribery and prostitution or discrimination.

Sociolinguistics and dialectology, when identifying people with regional accents, for example.

Speech analysis, which involves analysis of conversation and the use of discursive markers, the way phrases are initiated or the use of stylistic resources, for example, to identify people. In this sense, pragmatic and discursive values, the speaker’s intention and the effect this can have on the target text become quite important. Some authors who have explored this field are, for example, Berk-Seligson (1990), Krouglov (1999), and Hale (2004).

Everything mentioned above requires specific skills, and therefore also requires training and practice which is complementary to and goes beyond typical translator or interpreter training (see Chapter 25 on training interpreters). That said, in terms of the skills or abilities one must possess in TR&tl, González et al. (2012) assert that the skills required to perform FTT work are congruent with the core competencies and formal knowledge and experience essential for court interpreters. These are: (1) superior, native-like proficiency in both the source language and target language, including formal knowledge; (2) depth and breadth of general vocabulary and specialized terminology; (3) sociocultural competence; (4) metalinguistic awareness; (5) demonstrated skills in translation and interpretation; (6) higher order cognitive skills; (7) knowledge of the justice system and legal procedures; and (8) knowledge of and adherence to professional ethical standards. However, FTT also demands additional unique skills and areas of knowledge which are related to the FTT specialist’s primary task of transcribing and translating spoken language.

There are no specific, universally recognized regulations with respect to the transcripts used in judicial proceedings. It is the case law of each country that determines the guidelines in terms of the validity or invalidity of the transcripts used as evidence. The use of transcripts is usually defined in the legislation governing the use of telephone communication as evidence, which stipulates that a basic requirement is that it be obtained through lawful means. The permissible means of obtaining evidence in different countries are different, as are the reasons cited when trying to have an undercover recording and its transcription declared unlawful or illicit. Among the different reasons alleged by González et al. (2012) are a lack of or insufficient motive; a lack of judicial oversight when collecting evidence, enforcement, and subsequent deferral of phone taps; legal inaccuracy of authorization; or lack of supporting materials needed to authorize the recording, something which frequently occurs in many judicial bodies lacking adequate equipment; and assigning the task to translators or interpreters or even merely bilingual individuals without assessing the difficulty and risk involved if a defective transcript is produced. In addition to the overall challenges in gathering the evidence, there are some irregularities that may be found regarding the transcripts themselves which may eliminate a transcript from consideration as evidence. These may include:

- Errors involving telephone numbers;
- Transcripts are not checked against audio recordings;
- Recordings are not listened to as part of a preliminary investigation;
- No record of the translator who produced the translation;
- No record of who produced the transcript or their level of competence.

Most frequently, the irregularities are not found in the transcript itself nor in its structure or organization, but rather in the process of collecting the recordings used for the transcript.
Currently, as we have mentioned in previous sections of this chapter, many recordings are made in controlled settings using professional audio equipment that enables transcription, with a few limitations. This said, in the field of forensic translation and transcription, these recordings are sometimes done in secret, from a distance and in a noisy setting, using poor quality equipment and inadequate recording methods. These recordings can be very difficult to decipher, and sometimes require the skills and knowledge of translators/interpreters with specific linguistic training, or the help of expert phoneticians or other professionals who are not always available and who do not always possess the software that facilitates the task of TR&tl.

There are not many references or studies focused on the role the interpreter plays – or could play – and the difficulties faced when he or she must transcribe oral conversations with legal implications. One of the few examples found is an article on asylum hearings by Pöchhacker and Kolb (2009). The authors comment on the difficulties of transcribing but also analyse the interpreter’s role as co-producer of the written record, this record being prime evidence in many cases:

This evidentiary function tends to increase the weight given to the written record. … not least in documenting vagueness or contractions in an applicants’ account in the event of a negative decision. The written record, thus, is closer in nature to a verbatim standard, with far-reaching implications for the work of the interpreter in such hearings.

(Pöchhacker and Kolb 2009: 121)

Later they add:

There is no doubt that the interpreters who assume responsibility for the correctness and completeness of the record – e.g. by spelling out names, indicating punctuation, pausing for the typist or repeating parts of their delivery – enhance the efficiency of the interviewing process. Nevertheless, their additional role as co-producers of the record may also come with added liability in case of inconsistencies or outright errors in the written outcome of the hearing.

(Pöchhacker and Kolb 2009: 129)

Other examples that reveal the importance of transcription and translation in legal processes can be found in the research on terrorist attacks and distant languages and cultures, as is the case of Spanish and Arabic in the articles by Valero-Garcés and Abkari (2010) and Taibi and Martin (2012). Their work reveals some of the main difficulties found in FTT by experts and researchers:

- Lack of specific training and adequate resources.
- Absence of directives and precise criteria for transcripts.
- Lack of knowledge regarding the central objective of the transcript or investigations.
- Lack of clear limits defining work of the transcriber and translator/interpreter or change of roles.
- Lack of information regarding the origin and length of the recording and the target audience.
- Urgent need for transcripts, without ways and means of expediting them, and based on a hasty reading.
- Lack of well-defined training areas such as linguistic and cultural geography or sociolinguistics, necessary to place the speakers within their context and contextualize their outward expressions, with the knowledge of how to respect and represent the implicit and explicit connotative registers in order to avoid producing a bad transcript or an unintentional falsification.
- Lack of knowledge about or access to electronic resources designed to support digital transcription or to process digital speech.
- Lack of concrete instructions and oversight and quality control mechanisms.

More research of this type is clearly needed, in addition to professionalization and certification within the subfield of FTT. Cordero-Esquivel and Cordero (2009) offer some recommendations to guide the professionalization of this specialized field and to ensure the production of forensic transcripts/translations that meet evidentiary standards of reliability, competence, relevance, and admissibility. These include:

- Establish minimum qualifications, testing, and certification for FTT specialists.
- Follow linguistically sound protocol and procedure, including the use of standardized legends in the performance of FTT.
- Oppose the use of untrained, untested, noncertified lay persons, police personnel or other alleged bilinguals who lack proper FTT skills, qualifications, and training to undertake such tasks.
- Educate judges and attorneys regarding the standards and qualifications necessary to perform FTT, in addition to informing them of the required methodology to produce a valid and reliable FTT document.

The first step could be the recognition of a transcription system or legend, such as the one suggested by González et al. (2nd ed. 2012) in Fundamentals of Court Interpretation. Theory, Policy, and Practice, or the efforts by the group ILFE (Lingüística Forense, Forensic Linguistics in English) and FITISPos (Formación e Investigación en Traducción e Interpretación en los Servicios Públicos, Training and Research in Public Service Interpreting and Translation in English) in Spain to develop a standardized transcription system to be used in the Spanish judicial system.

**Recommendations for practice and future directions**

Transcription and Translation is a complex process which implies both converting oral speech into written text and changing text from one language to another. It is a hybrid process, incorporating both interpreting and translating skills. A review of the information presented in this chapter shows different modes/types of transcribing as well as some of the applications for TR&tl in four specific areas or settings: Research (in oral spoken language); language teaching and learning; media and entertainment; and FTT.

The literature reveals that TR&tl is used for many different purposes but it is not necessarily considered a defined profession or specialization. In addition to no specific preparation being required of transcribers/translator, there is also no agreement over what protocols to follow or what transcription system to use, and the veracity of the TR&tl is not always verified. But reading a transcript is like looking through binoculars, and in any case when it has been prepared with the involvement of a translator/transcriber, the linguistic transformation is even greater. A transcribed text includes perceptions based on the words heard that might not coincide with those read in another language. Thus, a transcriber/translator is more than just an assembler of sound and words in another language.

New and innovative practices, which move beyond the classical view of literal transcription and translation, may widen the scope of translation studies and allow TR&tl to be defined as part of other activities in the world of entertainment, business, and industry, as well as language learning for specific groups, such as the deaf and blind, or immigrants or children in multilingual societies.
The growing need for FTT services in the legal arena demand professionalization and certification in this subfield so as to ensure a faithful record of what is heard in a taped conversation and to meet evidentiary standards of reliability, competence, relevance, and admissibility.

Technology is increasingly being used for transcribing interlingually, and this goes hand in hand with machine translation. Increased interest in post-editing in translators training might also influence the quality of transcribed material.

The expanding use of TR&TL warrants its inclusion in the academic interpreting and translation curriculum, and the different skills required of the varied tasks associated with it should be considered in combination with the use of new software applications to help train researchers and professional practitioners.

Further reading


References


Carmen Valero-Garcés


PART III

INTERPRETING SETTINGS
CONFERENCE INTERPRETING

Ebru Diriker

Introduction

Conference interpreting is generally understood to be the communication of messages which have been delivered in one language into another at formal and informal conferences and conference-like settings in either the simultaneous or consecutive mode (cf. AIIC, 1984; Pöchhacker, 2013). Conference interpreting thus refers to the setting where different modes of interpreting are carried out to enable communication between interlocutors who do not speak the same language. These settings are typically international conferences, multilateral meetings, and workshops, but can also include official dinners, press conferences, parliamentary sessions and a wide range of other gatherings.

The most prevalent mode used in conference interpreting is simultaneous interpreting (see ‘Facts and figures’, p.179 below, as well as Chapter 5 in this volume). In the simultaneous mode, the interpreter gives an interpretation of the incoming speech quasi-simultaneously with the speaker. There is generally a minimal time lag of only a few seconds between the presentation of the original speech and its rendition in another language. Simultaneous conference interpreters working between spoken languages use soundproof booths which are equipped with a simultaneous interpreting system, which allows interpreters to hear what the speakers say while simultaneously transmitting the interpreted version of the speeches to the listeners who are wearing headsets. In this mode, interpreters tend to be in the same room as the conference participants, but typically are not directly visible to the interlocutors.

Occasionally, simultaneous interpreting can also be done without a booth. One means of doing this is whispered interpretation (chuchotage) and the second is interpreting via a mobile interpreting system (bidule). In whispered interpretation, the interpreter sits next to or behind one or two participants and provides simultaneous interpretation in a quiet voice. When working with a bidule, on the other hand, the interpreter sits in the same room together with the participants and quietly speaks his/her interpretation of the speech into a hand-held microphone which transmits the interpretation to listeners who are wearing headsets. In that sense, working with the bidule is more or less like whispering except that the interpreter does not need to sit right next to the participants who requested interpretation. Working in the absence of a proper simultaneous interpreting system with soundproof booths, however, can be very taxing for interpreters. Interpreting in a proper booth gives interpreters control over the amplitude of the
incoming sound and this enables them to strike an optimum balance between listening, speaking and monitoring their output. When whispering, however, the interpreter has no control over the incoming sound and can face serious difficulties hearing the interlocutors, especially because the interpreter’s own voice tends to interfere with what she or he can hear. Furthermore, when whispering or using the bidule, the interpreter must control his/her voice and keep it low at all times to avoid distracting the other participants in the room. For these reasons, these modes of interpreting incur additional strains and are generally regarded as exceptions to the common practice of interpreting in soundproof booths.

In addition to working between two spoken languages, interpreters can also work simultaneously between a spoken and a signed language or between two signed languages. Signed languages used by the deaf deploy the visual-gestural medium (see Chapters 7 and 8 in this volume). Therefore, booths and interpreting equipment that are critical in preventing an ‘acoustic’ overlap when interpreting between spoken languages are unnecessary in the simultaneous interpreting of signed languages. For signed language interpreters, being seen by all deaf participants in the room is critical, which is why they tend to choose a highly visible location when they work.

Consecutive interpreting is the other mode used at conferences and conference-like settings (see Chapter 6 in this volume). In consecutive interpretation, the interpreter waits until the speaker finishes his/her speech, or a part of it, and then renders it in another language. The interpreter is generally in the room and sits or stands quite close to the interlocutors. Consecutive interpretation can take the form of short or long consecutive. Short consecutive tends to be the preferred mode for bi- or multilateral discussions where speakers take quick turns exchanging views. Long consecutive is used where one speaker takes the floor for a longer period of time, and this allows for a train of thought to continue in an uninterrupted manner. In long consecutive, the interpreter can wait up to 20 minutes and even longer before starting to interpret, and this requires strong note-taking skills. In this process, interpreters generally make use of their notes to reconstruct the speech in another language.

Although consecutive interpreting requires more time, its use extends to all conference settings, from the most formal to the most informal, depending on the preferences of the conference organizers, the number of languages used, logistical issues, cost concerns and so on. Consecutive interpreting is often used during lunch or dinner speeches, and during bilateral talks and missions in which delegations travel from one site to another. In large conferences, both modes can be used for different reasons. For example, while simultaneous may be the preferred mode during the main sessions of a conference, consecutive may be used at an opening dinner where the host delivers a short welcome speech.

Professionalization

Interpreting has existed for centuries, possibly ever since humans started communicating with each other in different languages (see Chapter 1 for a history of interpreting). Ancient Egyptian is known to have an expression for ‘interpreter’ (Bell, 1976), and interpreters have been influential in the spread of religions (Kaufmann, 2005; Karlik, 2010), in the setting up of critical commercial and political ties (Roland, 1999; Rothman, 2009) and in building, sustaining and eroding the power of empires (Delisle and Woodsworth, 1995; Philliou, 2001).

Conference interpreting is largely a continuation of this legacy and has flourished as a technology-assisted solution in meeting the demand for efficient cross-cultural communication. With the impetus provided by the proliferation of international organizations in the post-WWII period, conference interpreting underwent a rapid process of institutionalization. While consecutive
interpreting set the initial stage and continued to play an important role in conference interpreting, the simultaneous mode ultimately became more closely associated with conference interpreting (Baigorri, 1999 and Chapter 1 in this volume).

Two important developments that went hand in hand with the growing need for interpreters and played important roles in the process of institutionalizing conference interpreting were the founding of interpreting schools, first in Geneva and then in Vienna, and the creation of a worldwide professional organization, the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC).

Role of the AIIC

With currently over 2,900 members in 90 countries, the AIIC has played a significant role in the development of the profession for a number of reasons, the first of which was its early establishment. The AIIC was founded by the pioneers of the profession in 1953, only eight years after simultaneous interpreting gained visibility in Nuremberg (see Chapters 1 and 5). This early start allowed it to shape some of the professional practices and standards right from the beginning, and also explains why the professional standards advocated by the AIIC have found significant resonance in the world of conference interpreting, from working conditions to booth standards (now an ISO standard) and training guidelines.

The second factor that made the AIIC a pivotal player was its establishment both as a professional association and a trade union. As a trade union, AIIC concluded the first collective agreements with the United Nations, Coordinated Organizations and the European Community in 1969 (Thierry, 2009). Those agreements indexed the pay of freelance interpreters working for major international organizations to the remuneration of staff interpreters while also harmonizing the working conditions for the conference interpretation field. AIIC’s efforts to set a minimum daily fee for freelance interpreters working in the private market, however, were curtailed by a decision of the US Federal Trade Commission, which considered such action to be in violation of anti-trust laws. While this decision prevented AIIC from setting minimum daily rates for the private market, the association continued to negotiate agreements concerning recruitment, remuneration and working conditions for all freelance interpreters (whether members of the AIIC or not) working for the ‘Agreement Sector’. This sector currently includes the United Nations and its agencies, the institutions of the European Union, the Coordinated Organizations (the European Space Agency, the Council of Europe, NATO and the WEU), the World Customs Organization and the Global Union of Federations.

Lastly, from its first years onwards, AIIC has functioned as a quasi-accreditation body in which membership is not ‘automatic’, but relies on the endorsement of one’s performance by fellow interpreters. At a time when more objective accreditation tests and systems were missing, AIIC’s insistence on some form of (peer) accreditation contributed to raising the general awareness of ‘quality’ among professionals and users of conference interpreting services (see Chapter 2 in this volume).

Key terms of the profession

As conference interpreting became established, a number of well-established professional practices were developed. The terms that are commonly used to denote professional practices include:

Working languages (also referred to as a ‘language combination’): This term is used to refer to the languages with which an interpreter works. The working languages of interpreters are classified into two groups, namely ‘active languages’ and ‘passive languages’. In most cases, conference interpreters work from their ‘passive’ languages (also referred to as the ‘C language’) into their
native language (also referred to as the ‘A language’). Some interpreters have an excellent command of a language other than their native language and are able to work into that language as well, and hence they are said to have a second ‘active’ language (also referred to as the ‘B language’) (SCIC, 2014).

In other words, active languages (A and B) are those that interpreters work into while passive languages (C) are those that they only work from. AIIC’s definition of these language categories is as follows:

Active languages:

A: The interpreter’s native language (or another language strictly equivalent to a native language) into which the interpreter works from all of her or his other languages in both modes of interpretation, simultaneous and consecutive. All interpreters must have at least one ‘A’ language but may have more than one.

B: A language other than the interpreter’s native language of which she or he has a perfect command and into which she or he works from one or more of her or his other languages. Some interpreters work into a ‘B’ language in only one of the two modes of interpretation.

Passive languages:

C: Languages of which the interpreter has a complete understanding and from which she or he works (www.aiic.net – accessed 30 Sept 2014).

Relay Interpreting: This term refers to the type of interpretation in which an intermediary third language is used when interpreting from one language to another. While the general rule is that interpreters listen to the original speaker directly, in some instances (mostly at meetings carried out in multiple languages when interpreters in certain booths do not know one of the languages spoken by the speakers), interpreters can listen to and base their interpretation on the delivery of another interpreter in another booth. For instance, during meetings of the European Union at which all 24 official languages can be spoken, the interpreters in the Maltese booth might not know Estonian well enough to interpret from it. In this case, when a speaker speaks in Estonian, the interpreters in the Maltese booth can ‘connect’ to another booth and listen to the interpretation provided by their colleagues who are able to work from Estonian into a language they know (SCIC, 2014). ‘Relay’ can be used both in simultaneous and in consecutive interpreting.

In signed language interpreting, relay interpreting is also used to ensure more effective communication with a deaf person, especially if they have idiosyncratic language use. Prelingually deaf people who grew up using a signed language as their first language are often best placed to communicate with other deaf people and be trained to interpret for them (www.asli.org.uk – accessed 30 Sept 2014). Deaf interpreters usually take a ‘relay’ from a colleague who interprets from a spoken language into a signed language which the deaf interpreter knows. They then interpret that input into the signed language that their deaf audience knows. Naturally, deaf interpreters can also provide relays from one signed language to another which can then be used by a hearing interpreter who can convey that into a spoken language. In international settings, deaf interpreters also work into International Sign, a kind of lingua franca which is not as conventionalized or complex as a natural sign language (Nadja Grbić, 2014, personal communication).

Retour interpreting: Normally interpreters work into their mother tongue, although some interpreters know a second language well enough to be able to work into that language from
their mother tongue. Working into a foreign language is called ‘retour’ interpreting (after the French word for ‘return’).

A small number of interpreters know their second active languages so well that they are able to interpret into that language from all the languages in their language combinations. These interpreters are said to be able to work in two booths. Retour interpreting is especially useful in providing relays out of less well-known languages into more widespread languages (SCIC, 2014).

**Pivot:** If only one or two interpreters have a less common language as a passive language, they are said to be the ‘pivots’ for the interpreters working in other booths who take relays from them. The French term (and pronunciation) is universally employed.

At large meetings with many languages, it is best to avoid having a single pivot for any language. When a large team capable of working in 24 languages interprets, as is the case at many EU meetings, the relay is usually provided through different language families (Germanic, Romance, Finno-Ugric) in order to distribute the workload more evenly and avoid any imbalance in the interpretation that might result from always transiting through just one relay language or language group (SCIC, 2014).

**Language regime:** This term is used to refer to the active and passive languages of a given meeting.

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**Conference interpreting in the world**

Although conference interpreting was first practised in and continues to have a stronghold in Europe, it has spread quite rapidly and is currently practised around the world. A significant majority of conference interpreters are freelance interpreters who work in the private market (www.aiic.net). However, in some regions and countries, conference interpreters also work as staff interpreters for international or national organizations. The European Union and the organs of the United Nations are important recruiters of interpreting services in the institutional market. Regional organizations and national parliaments also tend to play an important role in some regions and countries. The following section offers a broad overview of the current situation:

**Europe:** Europe is possibly the most institutionalized conference interpreting market in the world. It currently hosts one-third of AIIC’s members (www.aiic.net). While most professionals in Europe are freelance interpreters who work in the private market, there is also a significant number of staff interpreters working for national or international organizations. In countries that host international organizations, like Switzerland and Belgium, those institutions can be the main drivers of the demand for interpretation. The European Union is the most important institutional player for the European market (see the ‘European Union’ section). Private companies and government agencies are the main clients of conference interpreters who work in the private market.

**Asia Pacific:** The main users of interpretation services are companies, international federations, governments and non-government organizations (NGOs) – in short, the private market. There are also meetings held by UN agencies, for which the majority of interpreters are sent from the respective UN agencies’ headquarters. This is mainly due to the fact that there is a short supply of interpreters in the region who have the required language combinations that are suitable for UN meetings.

The two major international or regional organizations in Asia Pacific which use interpreters are the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) in Noumea, New Caledonia, and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia Pacific (UNESCAP) in Bangkok, Thailand. The SPC only uses English and French interpretation, while UNESCAP uses only English, French,
Chinese and Russian. The Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), known as the Khmer Tribunals, have also created a small amount of demand for interpretation services, and they use English, French and Khmer and have four or five staff interpreters. It is not clear how much longer the Khmer Tribunals will last, but likely they will soon come to a close.

Almost all interpreters in the region are freelance interpreters and the region is primarily a freelance market. The number of meetings held by the UN is growing, however, as a result of Asian governments hosting such meetings more often (Jean Pierre Alain, 2014, personal communication).

South America: The main clients of conference interpreting services in South America are the private market (medicine, trade, law, agribusiness, technology and equipment, logistics, energy, telecommunications, universities, etc.), large state-owned enterprises such as oil and gas companies and other government agencies.

The main working languages are Spanish and Portuguese (only for Brazil), in combination with English. The South American market is strictly a ‘retour’ market. The only major international organization based in South America is ECLAC (UN Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), which is based in Santiago de Chile. ECLAC languages are Spanish, Portuguese and French. The Southern Common Market (MERCOSUL) does not operate on a regular basis and does not have staff interpreters. Also, there are no staff interpreters at any UN institutions in South America, including ECLAC (Branca Vianna and Claudia Cereghino, 2014, personal communication).

Africa: The main clients of conference interpreters are international organizations such as the African Union, regional integration organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and their institutions and specialized agencies, regional parliaments such as the Pan African Parliament and ECOWAS Parliament, and the African Development Bank. The languages used by the African Union and the Pan African Parliament are English, French, Portuguese, Arabic, Swahili and Spanish. ECOWAS uses English, French and Portuguese, while COMESA uses English and Portuguese; the African Development Bank uses English, French, Arabic and Portuguese and UN Agencies such as the United Nations Office at Nairobi (UNON) use the UN languages as well as Swahili. WHO-AFRO uses English, French and Portuguese.

In Cameroon (a bilingual country in which English and French are spoken) and South Africa (in which there are 11 official languages), conference interpreters also work extensively for public agencies. To a lesser extent, interpreters also work for the private market. Most interpreters in Africa are freelance interpreters (Jibola Sofolohan, 2013, personal communication).

North America: In the United States, graduates of interpreting programs increasingly work for the US government, international organizations, the private sector and non-profit/NGO organizations. Most private sector companies in the US will hire conference interpreters on a contract freelance basis. The United Nations and the US State Department are important institutional employers. Young interpreters who pass the US Department of State’s interpreting test usually start out as liaison interpreters before moving into seminar and eventually conference work as freelancers. Interpreters can combine work in different settings such as conferences and community settings, including state courts, hospitals and medical clinics in the community sector (Jeff Wood, 2014, personal communication; see also Kelly, Stewart and Vijayalaxami, 2010).

Being a bilingual country, Canada has a considerable interpreting market for all types of interpreting. Through its Conference Interpretation Services and Parliamentary Interpretation Service, both of which report to the Translation Bureau, the government of Canada is by far the country’s largest interpretation client. Those two organizations combined have approximately 75 staff interpreters and regularly recruit over 150 freelance interpreters. The number of new
private sector clients joining the ranks of more traditional public sector clients is also on the rise (www.aiic.net/page/1627/conference-interpretation-markets-in-canada/lang/1 – accessed 30 Sept 2014).

Arab countries: In Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the great majority of conference interpreters are freelancers, with the exception of a few staff members in Saudi Arabia within the Organization for Islamic Cooperation and the Islamic Development Bank, and some others in Tunisia within the African Development Bank.

The clients of conference interpreters are for the most part international organizations, but there is also demand for interpreting from governmental agencies and ministries (in Egypt), parliaments, some private market organizations, both local and international firms and some NGOs. International organizations cover the UN system agencies and thus require Arabic-speaking interpreters, as Arabic is one of the six official languages at the UN; the main languages are Arabic and English and sometimes French. Arabic booths are usually bi-directional, so interpreters are required to do retour; many organizations prefer an English retour, while others do not insist on it being in English or French (Anne-Marie Greis, 2014, personal communication).

European Union

In the institutional market, the EU is the largest recruiter of interpreting services today. EU institutions currently employ approximately 1,000 staff interpreters (European Parliament: 326, European Commission: 557, Court of Justice: 75 as of March 2014) and work with approximately 3,000 freelance interpreters who have been accredited by EU institutions (Christina Bahr for the EP, Claude Durand for SCIC, Patrick Twidle for CJ, 2014, personal communication).

What makes the EU the largest employer of interpreters is its policy of multilingualism, which recognizes the languages of all member countries as official languages of the organization. The emphasis placed on multilingualism in the EU is largely a result of its ‘supranational’ character, which sets it apart from ‘international’ or ‘intergovernmental’ organizations. While intergovernmental organizations tend to choose two or at most a few languages as working languages (NATO, for instance, uses French and English as its working languages although it has 28 member states), the EU currently has 28 members and 24 official languages (due to the fact that some countries use the same language, such as Austria and Germany, France and Belgium, etc.).

The three main institutions of the EU have extended interpreting services: the European Parliament’s Directorate General for Interpretation and Conferences, the European Commission’s Directorate General for Interpretation (SCIC) and the Court of Justice’s Interpretation Directorate. The first two also provide interpretation services for the other institutions of the EU.

Providing interpreting services in the ‘complete language regime’ with 24 languages (and sometimes even more if the meeting involves the languages of candidate countries or others) is a highly complex task. In order to provide interpretation in and out of 24 languages, a team of 72 interpreters needs to work in booths and cover as many as 552 possible language combinations (Olga Cosmidou, 2014, personal communication).

As these figures indicate, it is important for interpreters working for EU institutions to be competent in a number of passive languages, but interpreters do not need to have a second active language. Having a number of passive languages, from which an interpreter works into his or her mother tongue, is deemed to be more important than having two active languages. This is because the more passive languages the interpreters know, the less they need to use an intermediary language (i.e. relay interpretation) to convey the speakers’ messages. In fact, the EU only started to use interpreters with a B language after a bottleneck occurred with the
recent waves of enlargement starting with Finnish. The principle of working into one’s mother tongue from a number of passive languages continues to be widely practised, but for some of the ‘new’ booths (i.e., for languages that became official more recently such as Maltese, Estonian, Czech, Slovak and Croatian), interpreters can be asked to work into B languages which are usually one of the more widely spoken languages (such as English, French or German). This practice generally continues until a sufficient number of interpreters in other booths learn the new languages and start interpreting from them into their A language.

Given the importance of having a number of passive languages, staff interpreters in the EU are encouraged to add new languages to their existing language combinations. Furthermore, freelance interpreters (who are called Auxiliary Conference Interpreters, ACIs) are asked to have certain minimum language combinations depending on their mother tongue. As it stands, it is sufficient for an interpreter with Finnish or Estonian as a mother tongue to have only two active languages or one active and two passive languages (i.e., an AA, AB or ACC combination). However, for an interpreter who wants to sit the inter-institutional accreditation test of the EU for the English, French, German, Italian or Spanish booths, the minimum requirement is to have one active and four passive languages or two active plus three passive languages (i.e., ACCC or ABCC). It is therefore highly advisable for people who are interested in working for the EU to check the language profiles in demand before applying for a test and when deciding to add a new language (http://europa.eu/interpretation/doc/lang_profiles_in_demand.pdf – accessed 30 Sept 2014). The three criteria the EU currently uses for employability are the professional domicile (i.e., proximity to the meeting venue), the number of languages known and quality of performance.

United Nations

One of the other main players in the institutional market is the UN, which has four stations, each of which has its own interpreting divisions (known as the ‘interpretation service’ in New York and Geneva, and the ‘interpretation section’ in Nairobi and Vienna). Interpreters are also hired by the regional commissions of the UN in Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Beirut and Santiago.

The organization has six official languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish, and two working languages, English and French. All United Nations staff are required to know at least one of the working languages. The conferences and meetings held by the UN bodies may be conducted in all six official languages. Consequently, there are six corresponding language sections (booths) in the Interpretation Service. Normally, only these languages may be used at UN meetings. However, under the UN Charter, any member state may decide to speak in its own language at certain meetings on the condition that they provide their own interpreters who can work into one of the official languages.

Interpreters are identified by the language they work into, which at the United Nations is always their mother tongue in the English, French, Russian and Spanish booths. In other words, an English (booth) interpreter interprets from the other official languages into English. Because certain language combinations at the level required for interpreting work are rather rare, this structure is not applied to the Arabic and Chinese booths, where interpreters work both into and out of their mother tongues. This makes it unnecessary for English, French, Russian and Spanish booths to interpret from Arabic and Chinese directly. Instead, they ‘relay’ from the Arabic or Chinese interpreters who interpret into English or French.

The largest interpreting service in the UN system is at the UN Headquarters in New York, which provides interpretation during General Assembly and other regular meetings. There are 124 posts for the six languages, and currently, 113 of those posts are filled. During the regular
sessions of the General Assembly, 160 to 180 interpreters are needed. The UN relies on its list of freelance interpreters to meet the demand for interpretation in peak periods (Hossam Fahr, 2014, personal communication).

Interpreters wishing to work for the UN need to pass the exam, and to be eligible for the exam, candidates need to prove that they have studied interpreting or have considerable experience working as a simultaneous interpreter. Additionally, they must have as their main language one of the six official languages of the UN and know two more of the six core languages well enough to interpret from them into their main language. If the main languages of candidates are Arabic or Chinese, they also need to demonstrate an ability to interpret from their main language into another official language (www.unlanguage.org/Careers/Interpret/default.aspx).

Facts and figures

According to the figures issued by the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) in 2010, simultaneous interpreting is the most frequently deployed mode in conference interpreting both in the private and institutional market. In 2010, 82% of all working days reported by freelance and staff interpreters were carried out in the simultaneous mode, whereas pure consecutive represented on average only 5.5% of all working days (‘working days’ is used as a reference as conference interpreters tend to work by the day). Whispering constituted just 2.7% of interpreters’ work and interpreting with a bidule constituted just 3.9%. If whispering and bidule work are added to simultaneous interpreting in a booth, the share of simultaneous interpreting increases to 90.6%. Almost all interpreters reported practising simultaneous interpreting (94.4%), whereas consecutive was practised by only 51% of all respondents, interpreting with a bidule by 38.7% and chuchotage by 40.1% (AIIC, 2010).

Interestingly, however, although the use of whispering and, indirectly, also bidule are actively discouraged in the AIIC’s Code of Ethics as they tend to create a risk to high quality performance, the use of the bidule increased by almost 50% while simultaneous interpretation in booths seemed to be declining in frequency (84.3%) over the six-year period between 2005 and 2010. Consecutive interpreting was also on the rise, from 5.8% of all working days in 2005 up to 6.6% in 2010. Chuchotage seems to have remained stable (AIIC, 2010).

According to the same survey, interpreting in ‘typical’ conference settings such as conferences, meetings of intergovernmental organizations, workshops and training sessions constitutes the main workload for conference interpreters. Interpreting in non-conference settings, such as for the media and in community and court settings constitutes a fairly marginal share of the workload of conference interpreters. Only 17% of interpreters reported working for television, 10% for courts and 3% in community settings, and the number of days that interpreters worked in these settings was also low (AIIC, 2010). Naturally, the AIIC’s statistics only cover the responses of interpreters who explicitly refer to themselves as ‘conference interpreters’. The situation in the overall market is likely to be more diverse, with interpreters accepting work in a variety of settings (see, for example, Kelly, Stewart and Vijayalaxami, 2010 for the situation in North America). Most signed language interpreters, for instance, work both at conferences and in community settings. On the other hand, the use of signed languages in conferences is on the rise and may eventually lead some signed language interpreters to specialize solely in conference interpreting. The increase in the use of signed languages in conferences is clearly evidenced by the recent decision of the AIIC to open up membership to signed language interpreters.

In any discussion on conference interpreting settings, it is important not to overlook a new setting: remote interpreting (see Chapter 22 in this volume). In remote interpreting, the
interpreter is asked to provide interpretation in a location that is different from the location of the conference interlocutors. That location can be next door to the main conference room or thousands of miles away. While still controversial and not well-liked by most interpreters, according to AIIC’s (2010) survey almost 40% of all interpreters worldwide reported having worked at least once with remote speakers and one out of four with a remote audience. In Canada (7.5% of all work days), Israel (25.9%), Spain (6.2%), Germany (6.2%) and the USA (4.2%), interpreting remote speakers and/or remote audiences was noted to be above average. Interpreting remote speakers and interpreting remote audiences have both increased by almost 50% in six years.

**Professional code of ethics**

As with most professions, conference interpreters have their own code of ethics. AIIC’s Code of Ethics, which is currently also used as a reference by a number of national conference interpreters’ associations, emphasizes professional integrity, impartiality and confidentiality, but it does not offer specific performance instructions like the codes of other professional organizations that (also) represent court or community interpreters. The Code of the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT), for instance, offers clear definitions of ‘accuracy’ or ‘faithfulness’ and complements the ethical rules with a code of conduct that explains how ethical rules should be applied in practice (www.ausit.org/ausit/documents/code_of_ethics_full.pdf – accessed 30 Sept 2014). AIIC’s code, on the other hand, suffices by saying in Article 3 that ‘Members of the Association shall not accept any assignment for which they are not qualified. Acceptance of an assignment shall imply a moral undertaking on the member’s part to work with all due professionalism’ (www.aiic.net/code-of-ethics – accessed 30 Sept 2014), leaving most of the decision-making about what ‘due professionalism’ entails to the individual professional.

Whether regulated by codes or not, ethical issues and the ethical responsibility of interpreters are very much on the agenda of both the professional world and academia today. Sparked by the voluntary interpreting services provided at the World Social Forum, and further reinforced by the role interpreters play in wars and zones of conflict, an increasing number of practitioners and scholars are now calling for an ‘ethical turn’ in interpreting, asking practising interpreters to rethink their ethical responsibility in the light of the powers they serve and the policies they strengthen with their services (Boéri, 2008; Baker and Maier, 2011; see also Chapters 19 and 20 in this volume). This discussion will likely become even more prevalent in all circles in the near future.

**Training**

Conference interpreter training has come a long way since the first efforts were made to train conference interpreters for the 1928 International Labour Organization (ILO) Conference, followed by the establishment of the first school in Mannheim in 1930, which was later transferred to Heidelberg University (Kurz, 1996). Following in the footsteps of the first university-level interpreting programs in Geneva and Vienna in the 1950s, there are currently hundreds of interpreter training institutions around the world. Most of these offer programs at the undergraduate level and tend to be joint programs in translation and interpreting, but there is also a visible trend towards postgraduate programs specializing in conference interpreting. This is evident in the increasing number of schools taking part in the Schools Survey of the AIIC Training Committee, which only lists postgraduate programs (see http://aiic.net/directories/schools/finder – accessed 30 Sept 2014).
Conference interpreting

An interesting initiative in the area of interpreter training is the European Masters in Conference Interpreting (EMCI), which brings together postgraduate programs from around Europe organized around a core curriculum and adhering to clearly defined standards of quality (www.emcinterpreting.org – accessed 30 Sept 2014).

In conference interpreting, there is broad consensus on the basic standards of training. AIIC’s fundamental principles in interpreter training (www.aiic.net/page/60 – accessed 30 Sept 2014) have come to be largely shared by other players, such as the EMCI and numerous international and national organizations. The latter’s involvement is highlighted by the Declaration on the Training of Conference Interpreters, which was signed by 30 head interpreters of national and international organizations (HINTS, 2012). The best practices supported by all of these actors centre on the importance of offering training at the postgraduate level, using professional conference interpreters as trainers and program coordinators, administering proper entrance and final exams and allowing external jury members on the exam boards to ensure high levels of quality and transparency (see Chapter 25 for a more extensive discussion on training).

In addition to training initiatives, the field has also witnessed the development of more theoretically-oriented academic programs, which focus on training researchers in Interpreting Studies. A considerable number of MA and PhD theses are written each year on conference interpreting, and this upward trend is clearly visible in the growing number of entries in online bibliographies such as the Conference Interpreting Research Information Network (CIRIN) Translation Studies Bibliography (TSB) and Translation Studies Abstracts (TSA).

Conferecn interpreting as a field of research

Due to its important role in the institutionalization of interpreting both in the professional world and academia, conference interpreting has constituted the main focus of attention in scholarly research on interpreting. Although other types of interpreting have certainly caught up, conference interpreting continues to be an important area of study within the field of interpreting studies. The first study on conference interpreters dates back to 1931, when Spanish psychologist Jesus Sanz (1931) observed and interviewed interpreters with the aim of learning more about their work. Ever since then, an extensive literature has accumulated on the cognitive, social, psychological and physiological aspects of interpreting simultaneously and consecutively at conferences. Various chapters in this volume take up different aspects of this remarkable literature, including one fully devoted to interpreting research (see Chapter 4), as well as separate entries focusing on the different modes of interpreting used in conference interpretation (see Chapters 5 and 6) and the evolution of the profession (see Chapters 1 and 27). Given the comprehensive coverage of interpreting research in the other chapters, this entry limits itself to discussing research that has specifically focused on conference interpreting as a profession and briefly surveying the studies on the expectations of consumers, the professional image of conference interpreting and the role perceptions of conference interpreters.

Understanding what the users of interpreting services expect from conference interpreters has been a key concern for the profession (see Chapter 23 on quality). The needs and expectations of the users of interpreting services have been explored by around a dozen small- to large-scale user surveys (Kurz, 1989; 1993; Gile, 1990; Pöchhacker, 1994; Vuorikoski, 1995; Cattaruzza and Mack, 1995; Moser, 1995; Collados Aís, 2002; Weller and Yanez, 1998; Collados Aís et al., 2011).

In a significant number of these studies, which were based on questionnaires, users of interpretation have ranked ‘sense consistency with the original message’ as the most important expectation from conference interpreting. ‘Sense consistency’ was also ranked as a top priority
by interpreters when asked to rate which quality criteria mattered most to them (Bühler, 1986; Chiaro and Nocella, 2004; Zwischenberger and Pöchhacker, 2010).

While questionnaire results have consistently converged on the primacy of ‘fidelity to the meaning in the original speech’, various researchers have raised ‘reasonable doubt’ on a number of critical issues with regard to the validity of the quality criteria employed in user surveys, questioning whether all of us are indeed ‘talking about the same thing’ (Cattaruzza and Mack, 1995: 47).

Further critical reflection has centred on whether the same recipient groups share the same expectations. While Kurz (1989) suggested that this was likely, Vuorikoski (1995) argued that individual expectations differ greatly, even among members of the same audience. She emphasized that audience expectations can vary greatly from one meeting to another, even when the topic and interpreters were the same. She also contended that most of the respondents to her survey had a rather functional view of simultaneous interpreting, which led them to use the interpretation available according to their immediate needs. This view was also supported by Weller and Yanez (1998: 79) who claimed that ‘the audience using the interpretation service is not necessarily one uniform body’, and emphasized that even members of a single audience tended to have highly individual expectations from interpreting. Lastly, an impressive large-scale study by the Granada Group (ECIS) led by Collados Aís pointed to the complexity of users’ expectations by showing not only how individual users differ in what they understand from certain ‘quality criteria’, but also revealing the impact of rather subjective factors such as ‘first impressions’ in subsequent assessments of interpreting quality (Collados Aís et al., 2011).

The complex nature of interpreting has also become evident through studies that explore the professional image and role perceptions of conference interpreters (Feldweg, 1996; Angelelli, 2004; Gelke, 2008; Monacelli, 2009; Setton and Guo, 2011; Zwischenberger, 2011; see also Chapter 27 in this volume). Among other findings, this area of research has highlighted the discrepancy between the expectations of users and the reality of interpreting. It has shown that outsiders to the profession, such as the media, expect interpreters to be ‘faithful to the word’ and judge interpreters with this highly subjective yardstick, while insiders to the profession, like interpreters and their professional associations, insist that their task entails the transfer of the ‘meanings’ intended by the speakers and not of the words they use (Diriker, 2009). Interestingly, the tension between describing interpreters as passive intermediaries versus active decision-makers even appears in the discourse of interpreters themselves. While most interpreters define their idealized role as a neutral mediator between languages, interpreters’ readers, blogs and memoirs (e.g. Çorakçı Dişbudak, 1991; Feng, 2007), which contain anecdotal accounts and real-life stories by interpreters, are full of references to instances in which interpreters shape their delivery not only with regard to the linguistic or semantic aspects of the original speech, but also with regard to situational, psychological and other factors.

The discrepancy between the unrealistic and at times conflicting expectations of users and the complex real-life situations in which interpreters need to work most likely constitutes a key challenge in the practice of the profession. This, however, is not necessarily a deterrent, since 84% of all interpreters in the AIIC’s Workload Study (2002) actually reported being very satisfied with the challenging nature of the profession.

**Future challenges**

In the near future, some of the possible challenges for the profession will include the increasing use of remote interpreting in numerous settings, and that will necessitate the development of standards if this is to be used properly. Also, the increasing use of English in conferences (either
alone or as the only ‘retour’ language) will continue to shape the general demand for the profession as well as the need for particular language combinations of professionals. Another issue is the increasing speed of deregulation, which might have an impact on the number of international organizations with which collective agreements are concluded. Lastly, there is the matter of the development of international standards for the profession, which is gaining particular importance as some national authorities now require national accreditation systems to be enforced for conference interpreting. Such steps toward nationwide standardization have been taken in Italy, Germany and Turkey, and preliminary efforts are under way to develop professional standards for conference interpreting at the international level. Given the importance of the issue, it is clear that significant investments in time and effort will need to be made for such standards to properly materialize.

Further reading

A comprehensive and cohesive account of Interpreting Studies in all its breadth.

An anthology of critical readings in Interpreting Studies.

An overview of conference interpreting since its birth at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference until now.

A valuable insight into the profession and practice of conference interpreting.

A book that offers readers with the conceptual bases required to understand the recurrent issues and difficulties in professional interpreting.

References


 Côrakçı Düşbudak, B., 1991. Tane Tane Simultane: Simultan Üzerine Merak Etğiniz Hersey, Komiklikler de Cabas (Everything you have always wanted to know about simultaneous interpreting plus the funny things). İstanbul: Altı Kitaplar.


Conference interpreting


Introduction
This chapter aims to give an overview of the topic of court interpreting. It begins with the definition of court interpreting and court interpreters, and describes the different modes of interpreting used in court interpreting and the skills and aptitudes required of court interpreters. It briefly discusses different the legal systems in which interpreters are engaged, the demanding nature of court interpreting work, and court interpreter certification, training, and professional statuses. It provides a brief introduction to legal frameworks such as international and domestic law and regulations which govern court interpreting, quality standards, and others. It also describes how countries and different jurisdictions have tried to improve the standards of court interpreting, and discusses how domestic courts and international courts differ when it comes to court interpreting. Drawing on research findings and a review of the literature, this chapter discusses the issue of the quality of interpreting required in court interpreting settings and the intricacies surrounding the role of court interpreters. Finally, it suggests key issues and topics for further research, and concludes with suggestions for further reading.

Definition of key terms

Court interpreting and court interpreter
A narrow concept of court interpreting restricts it to courtroom settings, but it generally covers interpreting in a wide range of judiciary settings, from courts to tribunals and from police interviews to legal consultations. Thus, court interpreting is often considered synonymous with legal interpreting, forensic interpreting, and judiciary interpreting. It is not restricted to criminal settings, but it has drawn the most attention in the context of criminal proceedings. Court interpreters play an important role in removing language barriers during the interactions between court personnel and people who do not understand or speak the language of the court. In this chapter, the term court interpreter refers to those working in legal settings, not necessarily limited to certified court interpreters. The discussion here excludes police interpreting for the most part.
Modes of court interpreting

The modes used in legal settings include consecutive interpreting and simultaneous interpreting (see Chapters 5 and 6). Court interpreters also carry out various translation tasks from translating transcripts and legal documents to sight translating documents during the proceedings (González et al., 1991; Edwards, 1995; see also Chapter 9). Short consecutive interpreting is used predominantly during the examination of witnesses and defendants from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, whereas simultaneous interpreting is often used during interpreting of proceedings. During the discussion of procedural matters and legal arguments and the examination of witnesses who speak and understand the language of the court, simultaneous interpreting is the preferred mode of interpreting. In most domestic courts, simultaneous interpreting may be delivered in whisper mode, rather than from booths, when there are one or two participants who do not understand the proceedings. Relay interpreting may be used when an interpreter is not available for a given language combination. In relay interpreting, interpreting is delivered first by a pivot interpreter into a third language, and this is relayed in turn by another interpreter into the language that the court or the speaker understands. Unlike conference settings, consecutive relay interpreting is more common than simultaneous relay interpreting in domestic courts. Since relay interpreting is more likely to entail problems due to the complicated interpreting process, both interpreters must be equally competent to convey the original utterances accurately (see Lee, 2014, and Chapter 11 for further discussion of these various modes).

In cases where a trial involves more than one defendant whose interests conflict with each other, where there are co-defendants speaking different languages, or where there is a large number of co-defendants, the court may have to provide a separate interpreter for each defendant (Hewitt, 1995: 143). It is also recommended that when the matter is of critical importance, or when the proceedings will last longer than an hour, there should be a team of interpreters who take turns in order to prevent interpreter fatigue. This is a common practice in sign language interpreting (see Chapter 7 for more on sign language interpreting), but not so much in spoken language interpreting in legal settings. In civil litigation, the parties often hire “check” interpreters to observe the opposing party’s interpreter during testimony and call attention to any errors (Lee, in press).

Aptitude and competence of court interpreters

Court interpreters should have a mastery of two languages, including regional varieties, swearing and slang, and formal registers like legalese and specialized terminology, since they have to interpret the testimonies of lay witnesses and expert witnesses as well as lawyers’ questions and legal arguments. Because they are expected to preserve propositional meaning as well as the registers, style, and tone of the speaker in interpreted renditions (González et al., 1991: 36, 272; Mikkelsen, 1998: 22), they need advanced interpreting skills. In addition to general interpreting skills such as concentration, memory, and analytical ability, court interpreters also need interpersonal skills, discourse management ability, and knowledge of the legal system (González et al., 1991: 19; Hale, 2010: 443). Furthermore, strong nerves and flexibility in dealing with stressful working conditions are indispensable for court interpreters since they frequently work in highly contentious and tense environments, and sometimes deal with harrowing details of events while interpreting for people from all walks of life.

Adversarial v. inquisitorial system

Legal systems are largely divided into adversarial and inquisitorial/non-adversarial systems. In an adversarial system, the court plays primarily the role of a referee between the prosecution and the
defence. The adversarial system is commonly found in Anglo-American common law countries, but it is also found in civil law countries such as South Korea and Japan. Adversarial parties offer their version of events and argue their case before a judge and/or jury. Evidence is primarily presented through examination-in-chief and vetted through cross-examination. In an inquisitorial system, the court is actively engaged in the fact-finding process. While there is no cross-examination and re-examination of witnesses in the inquisitorial system, witnesses are still questioned and challenged. However, the rules concerning admissibility of evidence in the inquisitorial system are considered more lenient than in the adversarial system. The inquisitorial system is widespread in many European countries such as Germany, France, and The Netherlands.

Court interpreters need to understand the functions and purposes of different phases in court proceedings and the discursive practices associated with them in these different systems. The language of witness testimonies is crucial in both adversarial and inquisitorial systems, and therefore accurate rendition by interpreters is of great significance. However, given that oral evidence is the primary type of evidence presented in the adversarial system, language is viewed as an important tool in the adversarial trial, and as such lawyers and judges pay a great deal of attention to getting an accurate verbatim transcript, to be relied upon in case of an appeal (Mikkelson, n.d.).

**History/early developments**

It is not possible to pinpoint the beginning of court interpreting, but it would be safe to assume that it has a long history spanning centuries. This section will focus on 20th century court interpreting, during which both court interpreting studies and the professionalization of court interpreting started. We will begin with a discussion of the legal basis for the provision of court interpreting and then move onto the issue of quality in court interpreting, both of which are recurrent themes in the literature.

**Legal frameworks for the provision of court interpreting**

There are various legislative frameworks such as international law, domestic law (including case law), and court rules and policies that govern the issue of court interpreting either directly or indirectly. International covenants establish the principle of respect for human rights and the right to freedom from discrimination and to a fair trial (e.g. the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination of 1966, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCP) of 1966). Many of the provisions of international law “do not specifically refer to the right to an interpreter, but to make them effective such a right would need to be inferred” (Laster and Taylor, 1994: 75). Article 14 of the ICCP and Article 40 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, for example, specifically guarantee one’s right to the free assistance of an interpreter if one cannot understand or speak the language used in court. The legal interpretation and implementation of these international laws in domestic jurisdictions, however, is up to each signatory state.

Articles 5 and 6 of the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) set out that all persons who are arrested shall be informed promptly, in a language they understand, of the reason for their arrest and of any charge against them, and all those charged with a criminal offence have the right to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation against them and to have the free assistance of an interpreter if they do not understand or speak the language of the proceedings. The European Court of Human Rights has made decisions that reflect the
principles set forth in the ECHR. In *Luedicke, Belkacem and Koc v. Federal Republic of Germany*, for example, the Court held that free assistance of an interpreter is unconditional regardless of acquittal or conviction of a defendant, and that the provision of interpreting extends beyond the trial per se to include a committal hearing as well as translation or interpretation of all documents used in proceedings that were necessary for a fair trial (Laster and Taylor, 1994: 76). Similarly, in *Kamasinski v. Austria*, the Court held that the interpreting assistance should include document translation during the pre-trial proceedings where this is necessary, so that the person charged can understand everything in order to have the benefit of a fair trial (Hertog and Bosch, 2001: 15).

There has, however, been a lack of consensus on the requirements of court interpreters among EU member countries, which has resulted in different standards and level of access to court interpreting. After a series of projects which examined the issues of equal access to justice and encouraged the establishment of internationally consistent best practice standards and equivalencies in legal interpreting and translation (see Hertog, 2001 and 2003 for Grotius Project, and Keijzer-Lambooy and Gsille, 2005 for AGIS project), the EU member states have agreed to set up common standards for legal interpreting and translation by adopting the 2010 Directive (European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice, 2012: 369). Article 2 (1) of the Directive provides that “Member States shall ensure that suspected or accused persons who do not speak or understand the language of the criminal proceedings concerned are provided, without delay, with interpretation during criminal proceedings before investigative and judicial authorities, including during police questioning, all court hearings and any necessary interim hearings.” Article 2 (8) provides that “interpretation provided under this Article shall be of a quality sufficient to safeguard the fairness of the proceedings.” Article 5 also reiterates the quality of interpreting and translation. The EU members have to incorporate the Directive into domestic law in due course, but it applies only in criminal proceedings and some EU member states are exempt from such a legal obligation under the EU legal framework. Consequently, the application of homogeneous quality standards throughout the EU may not be easy.

Some countries have statutory laws regarding the provision of court interpreting, whereas other countries do not have such laws but do have established court rules or policies. In the U.S., for example, the right to interpretation is not explicitly specified in the U.S. Constitution, but it is in the constitutions of some states (e.g. California). However, in U.S. District Courts, the right to an interpreter is recognized by case law based on the 5th, 6th and 14th amendments to the Constitution (de Jongh, 2012: 3). The Court Interpreters Act of 1978, which was enacted in order to ensure that a non-English speaking (NES) person has a certified court interpreter’s assistance, applies in federal criminal cases or in civil cases instituted by the U.S. government. Since it is a federal law, it does not apply in most civil matters or in state courts. Because the law permits courts to use an uncertified interpreter if the services of a certified interpreter are not available, there is a need for a stronger statute which requires courts to make vigorous efforts to locate and retain a certified court interpreter (Mathers, 2007: 30). Many state courts have joined efforts to facilitate non-English speaking persons’ access to court and to guarantee their right to a fair trial by establishing state court interpreter certification programs. There are also often state codes or statutes which regulate the selection and appointment of court interpreters (e.g. Ohio, Florida, and Texas). Other states have court rules which govern the qualifications and appointment of court interpreters (e.g. Maryland and New Jersey). Engagement of certified interpreters in court interpreting is common, but many states in the U.S. still do not have laws mandating the engagement of competent interpreters in police interrogation (*Chicago Tribune News*, 2012), and police officers are used as interpreters during several phases of a criminal case from investigation to interviews and interrogations (Berk-Seligson, 2009: 23). Given that police interpreting has legal consequences when the case goes to
court proceedings, it is very important that qualified professional interpreters who can maintain impartiality and accuracy are employed in police settings as well (Russell, 2000; Nakane, 2009; Lai and Mulayim, 2013).

Precedent decisions in individual court cases have also aided in establishing the right to an interpreter and meaningful participation in courtroom proceedings. The English Court of Appeal decision in R. v. Lee Kun (1916) is often cited as the basis for the common law approach to the right to an interpreter in a criminal case. Because the trial court did not provide interpreting for him, the Chinese defendant neither communicated with his counsel through an interpreter nor did he understand the evidence against him in his trial. The general practice in English courts at the time was not to provide interpretation of evidence to non-English speaking defendants who were legally represented. The Court of Appeal noted that “a failure to have the evidence interpreted would not result in the proceedings being invalid, unless a substantial miscarriage of justice had taken place” (Dobinson and Chiu, 2005: 33). Although the Court did not overturn his death sentence, it recognized the defendant’s right to a fair trial and his need to understand the case against him so that he could confront witnesses against him (R. v. Lee Kun, 1916, 1 K.B. 337 (C.C.A.)). This English case has been cited in a number of appellate considerations of the entitlement to interpretation around the world (Morris, 1999: 102).

A landmark case of Negron (U.S. ex. rel. Negron v. State of New York, 434 F.2d 386 (2d Cir. 1970)) changed the court’s practice in terms of provision of interpreting in the U.S. The prevailing practice at the time was that the court used interpreters to enable the court and the jury to understand the testimony of NES witnesses, but NES parties had to provide their own interpreter if they wanted to understand the proceedings (Mathers, 2007: 23). However, the federal district court noted that Negron, who was not provided with interpretation, was deprived of meaningful access to the proceedings and due process of law. The court said, “in order to afford Negron his right to confrontation, it was necessary under the circumstances that he be provided with a simultaneous translation of what was being said for the purpose of communicating with his attorney to enable the latter to effectively cross-examine those English speaking witnesses to test their credibility, their memory and their accuracy of observation in the light of Negron’s version of the facts” (U.S. ex. rel. Negron v. State of New York, 310 F.Supp. 1304, 1307 (E.D.N.Y. 1970)).

The concept of linguistic presence was further established in Arizona v. Natividad (1974). The Supreme Court of Arizona held that the NES defendant’s physical presence in the courtroom is not equivalent to meaningful presence, but that he or she should follow the proceedings and communicate in the courtroom proceedings (Arizona v. Natividad, 526 P.2d 730 (1974), de Jongh, 2008: 21). However, the notion that defendants must receive interpretation of evidence in order to understand the case against them generally applies only to criminal cases. In many countries, parties in civil cases do not have the automatic right to an interpreter, so they have to bring their own interpreters, or the court provides interpreting services and recovers the related expenses from the parties requiring interpreting. However, in some jurisdictions, parties in both criminal and civil proceedings are entitled to interpreting services, regardless of their economic status.

The determination of when to provide interpretation is typically up to the judge’s discretion, and the court must decide whether someone needs an interpreter based on the principle of a fair trial (Laster and Taylor, 1994: 78). Some U.S. state court rules provide questions judges may use when determining the need for interpreters’ service. However, the court lacks expertise to determine whether an interpreter is necessary for a defendant and who is qualified to serve as an interpreter (Benmaman, 2002: 2). In practice, courts tend to choose to err on the side of caution by providing interpreters. In Australia, since NES witnesses do not have a legal obligation to
prove their need for an interpreter, and they may appeal against the court’s decision on their competence to speak and understand English, courts tend to provide interpreters when NES parties are involved. In Canada, based on case law, if criminal defendants state that they cannot understand the language of the court, the court provides interpreting without assessing their language ability.

In some countries, however, one’s right to an interpreter is not explicitly stipulated, but in practice, the free assistance of an interpreter is provided for criminal defendants. For example, in South Korea and Japan, provision of interpreting is not fully recognized as a matter of CALD defendants’ rights or entitlements but it is mainly for the benefit of the court in obtaining evidence. Whether access to court through interpreter is a right that a CALD person is entitled to or instead, a favour granted by the court, may make a big difference in the attitude of the court and, subsequently, in the quality of court interpreting. In the latter case, the concept of linguistic presence may not be upheld and some judges ask for summary interpreting or even ask that interpreting not be provided when defendants or witnesses are not directly addressed (Lee et al., 2013).

Quality of interpreting

One’s right to a fair trial cannot be divorced from the quality of interpreting. Mere provision of interpreting does not necessarily guarantee a fair trial or equal access to the court, and it may, in fact, hinder the court’s access to legal evidence in a language it does not understand. There are various legislative formulations that define who provides interpretation in legal settings, but vaguely worded requirements such as a “competent interpreter,” a “qualified interpreter,” or simply “an interpreter” may impede due process, especially when there is no certification system for court interpreters. This is why Laster and Taylor (1994: 91) rightly state that “the right to an interpreter would be an inconsistent entitlement of variable quality … and the right to an interpreter should specifically articulate the right to a professional, accredited interpreter.”

The problem is that inadequate interpreting may go unnoticed in many cases. The quality of interpreting is sometimes questioned in courtrooms and may eventually lead to appeals; however, courts rarely accept that poor interpreting hampered the course of justice, and appeal cases based on incompetent interpreting rarely succeed (see Dunnigan and Downing, 1995; Benmaman, 2000; Hayes and Hale, 2011). In fact, in South Korea and Japan, appeals based on inadequate interpreting are often rejected, and inadequate interpreting is not seriously considered as grounds for appeal or retrial (Lee et al., 2013). (For more information on quality in interpreting, see Chapter 23.)

Current situation of the profession

For conference interpreting, there are comparatively uniform worldwide industry standards (see Chapter 11). For court interpreting, on the other hand, some countries have established systems while others are still lagging behind. In countries which have a relatively well-developed court interpreting system, professional organizations of interpreters have played important roles in advancing the standards of the profession, professional responsibilities and training.

Court interpreter certification systems

Not many countries have an established court interpreter certification system. The U.S. and Canada do, for example, whereas countries such as the U.K., Denmark, and Australia do not,
although they do have a public service interpreter or community interpreter accreditation system (see Chapter 14 on community interpreting). In Australia, there are distinct accreditations for interpreters and translators. An interpreter cannot provide official translations to be submitted to courts unless they have accreditation in translation. Certification is often associated with training and thus contributes to the improvement of service quality. On the other hand, there are many countries, such as South Korea, Japan, and China, which do not have a court interpreter certification system or any other type of community interpreter accreditation. Many countries do have a nationwide sign language interpreter certification (see Chapter 7), although few have a specialized sign language interpreter certification for court interpreting.

In countries which require court interpreter certification, like the U.S. for example, in order to practice court interpreting as a certified interpreter, interpreters have to pass an examination. The U.S. has several types of court interpreter examinations. The federal court interpreter certification examination was introduced in 1980, but it is limited to a few languages. State-certified court interpreter examinations are available in diverse languages, but given that there are hundreds of languages spoken in the country, still only a fraction of languages are tested in the U.S. court interpreter examinations. The court interpreter examinations in the U.S. may be administered by different entities, but they are similar in that they consist of written tests on language proficiency and interpreting performance tests. Test subjects, methods, and pass requirements do differ however. For instance, some exams test simultaneous interpreting skills in both language directions while others do not. The court interpreter examination given by the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT) includes a translation test, but federal and most state court interpreter examinations do not include translation. A distinction should also be made among different skill requirements for interpreting and translation, as a court interpreter may be asked to both translate and interpret, but there is no clear distinction between the two in the examination system. By comparison, in Australia, there is a separate accreditation for interpreting and translation, and interpreters are not asked to undertake translation of trial-related documents unless they are qualified in specific language directions. (See Chapter 24 for more discussion of interpreter assessment.)

In places where there are certification or licensing programs for court interpreters, credentialed individuals are often required to revalidate or renew their certificate or license regularly. In order to maintain a valid certificate, they have to practice for a minimum number of hours, attend training, and abide by codes of professional ethics. Where there is a lack of court interpreter certification system, there is a high chance that untrained and often incompetent interpreters will be employed, and ad hoc interpreters and even volunteers allowed to serve, regardless of their interpreting competence (Lee 2012, 2014, 2015).

Certification systems are often linked with codes of ethical practice and discipline as well. In countries where there is a professional accreditation or certification, interpreters’ compliance with ethical codes is encouraged by stipulating that breaches of the code of ethics are subject to disciplinary actions which may include license suspension. (See also Chapter 20 on ethics.)

**Training**

Currently, court interpreter certification is not linked to formal training in most jurisdictions, and there is no compulsory pre-service training in many countries. This partly explains why the quality of service is inconsistent and varies greatly according to interpreters’ competence. That said, while formal training is not required to work as court interpreters, many interpreters do pursue training specific to this environment, and this can come in a variety of formats. Formal training over a medium to long term is offered at universities as part of a degree or a certificate.
program or as a non-degree program, and this training may include training specific to court interpretation. Private training institutes and interpreters’ professional associations also provide training in preparation for certification examinations. Informal training offered on a short-term basis includes a pre-service induction on basic interpreting skills and work ethics and on-the-job training. In the U.S., courts or court-authorized agencies and institutions provide one- or two-day court interpreter orientation workshops. This is a requirement in most state certification programs because of the importance and benefit of an orientation program, particularly for new interpreters. However, a court interpreter orientation program is a short workshop, not a systematic course of training for professional interpreters.

Generally speaking, training opportunities for court interpreters are limited in many countries because there are few courses. Where they are available, they are offered in major foreign languages, and minority language speakers do not have access to them. Therefore, non-language-specific or language-neutral training courses may be a viable option as an alternative method of teaching interpreters of a variety of minority languages. (See Chapter 24 for further discussion of training of interpreters.)

Across the world, many interpreters at work in court proceedings are untrained, yet expected to perform complex tasks of interpreting and even translating. The current status quo of court interpreting in many countries reflects a lack of understanding of the complexities and professionalism that come with proper training (see Hale, 2010). Court interpreting researchers and interpreter trainers strongly recommend specialist training for court interpreting given the demanding tasks associated with it.

It is also important that court interpreting service users understand the process of interpreting and the role of court interpreters in order to work effectively with interpreters in legal settings. That is why the National Center for State Courts provides judges with a guide to standards for interpreted proceedings. For example, in the states of New York and California, judicial officers and administration staff have opportunities to attend training for better understanding of interpreting, qualifications of court interpreters, and procedures in utilizing interpreting services (Mathers, 2007: 34). In Australia, a number of initiatives have been implemented to educate legal professionals and the judiciary on the work of interpreters, interpreting process, and how these parties can best work together (Hale, 2007: 93).

Employment

Countries with a long history of immigration and multiculturalism have established court interpreting systems, including accreditation, certification, training, and remuneration as described above. In contrast, countries which have experienced an influx of foreign population only in recent decades have just begun to cope with the increasing demand for court interpreting, often meeting the need for interpreters on an ad hoc basis. Overall, this means that the profession is at varying stages of development in different countries. The majority of court interpreters working in domestic courts are freelance interpreters who are hired either on a contract or an ad hoc basis. In some countries with a high demand for court interpreting, for example Spanish interpreters in the U.S. courts and Chinese interpreters in the Hong Kong courts, staff court interpreters are employed on a full-time or part-time basis. In Malaysia, on the other hand, court interpreters are public servants, and they also serve as clerical staff and paralegals on top of their interpreting duty (Ibrahim and Bell, 2003).

These varying employment statuses lead to varying remuneration practices. Some countries have set fee schedules for court interpreters while others do not, leaving it to each court’s discretion. For example, both federal and state courts in the U.S. have separate rates, offering
different levels of payment to certified interpreters and uncertified ones. Court interpreters in countries like the U.S. and Australia are allowed to charge for overtime and cancellation fees, and are provided compensation for travel expenses and mileage in addition to interpreting fees. In the New Jersey state courts, interpreters are even offered payment for preparation time. By comparison, in some countries, interpreters are not compensated when the booked appointment is cancelled at no fault of their own, and are not even paid for working overtime. Because of variations in court interpreter remuneration, it is not easy to compare interpreting fees across different jurisdictions. Generally speaking, court interpreters working in domestic courts are not well paid, despite the skills and professionalism required for the accomplishment of the job; for instance, the current fees for court interpreting are far lower than for conference interpreting and business interpreting. It is ironic that despite the high expectation for accuracy in court interpreting, courts do not seem to be willing to pay reasonable fees for such professional services.

Court interpreters often receive better payment for civil cases than for criminal ones because the parties, rather than the state, bear the cost of interpreting and they may select their own interpreters as long as they can afford to pay the fee demanded. However, in some countries, where interpreting is provided in some civil cases, the same rate applies to both criminal and civil cases (Dosal et al., 2007).

International courts and tribunals, however, provide an illustration of model practices for court interpreter employment. While domestic courts often fail to recognize that interpreting is specialist work and may provide less than adequate working conditions, international courts and tribunals have long provided adequate working conditions for their interpreters (Hale and Stern, 2011). The first major international trial, which took place in Nuremberg in 1945, was a historic event in many aspects. The international war tribunals organized by the victorious Allied Powers required interpreters who could provide simultaneous interpreting. As such, the event contributed enormously to the development of the professions of conference and court interpreting. The arrangements that the tribunal made to ensure accurate record-keeping and support for the interpreters set a precedent for the current practices at international tribunals. In recognition of the complexity of the interpreting work, international tribunals usually employ a team of experienced conference interpreters and provide remunerations befitting conference interpreters. Such differences between international courts and tribunals and domestic courts are attributed to funding (Hale and Stern, 2011: 78). Given that poor working conditions do not attract competent interpreters, which in turn negatively affects the quality of interpreting, domestic courts and tribunals should emulate the international models (Hepburn 2012: 67). (See Chapter 1 on the history of interpreting and Chapter 11 on conference interpreting.)

**Ethics**

It is extremely important for court interpreters to adhere to professional ethics. Violations of professional code of ethics could endanger due process, affecting the outcomes of cases, life and liberty, and properties of the parties concerned. Codes of ethics for court interpreters and their professional responsibilities include accuracy, impartiality, confidentiality, limitations of practice, protocol and demeanour, and maintenance and improvement of skills and knowledge (de Jongh 2012: 183–187; see also Chapter 20). As defendants and witnesses from CALD backgrounds access the court through interpreters and vice versa, court interpreters should provide accurate and faithful interpretation without editing, summarizing, deleting or adding, while conserving the register, style, and tone of the speaker (González et al. 1991: 16). Not only addition or omission, but also explanation or paraphrasing, are prohibited according to the professional code of ethics.
Instead of guessing at meanings, interpreters should ask for clarification in order to avoid misinterpretation; they should also be quick to correct errors.

When court interpreters have any reservation about their ability to satisfy an assignment in a competent manner, they should immediately inform the appropriate judiciary authority and bring to the court’s attention any circumstances that impede full compliance with the code of ethics. Court interpreters should also remain impartial and neutral in proceedings where they serve, and they should disclose any conflict of interest. They must maintain the appearance of impartiality and neutrality, avoiding unnecessary contact with the parties to the matter. They should not disclose information they have obtained in the course of interpreting or translation and they should focus on their role as an interpreter, avoiding any inclinations to play the role of a legal adviser or a lawyer. Lawyers may work as interpreters if they have the qualifications for the job, but should not play dual roles as interpreter and legal representative in the same matter, in order to avoid conflict of interests.

The principal role of the court interpreter is to remove language barriers, so that a person from a CALD background is not at a disadvantage or at an advantage (González et al., 1991: 155–6). It is on the basis of that argument that court interpreters are expected to provide a faithful reproduction of original utterances, maintaining the discourse style of lawyers as well as witnesses, regardless of the comprehensibility of the interpreted renditions. Another important reason why interpreters’ faithful rendition is vital is attributed to the findings that the content, coherence, and speech style of witness testimony influence the impressions formed by jurors regarding the witness credibility and trustworthiness (Conley et al., 1978; Conley and O’Barr, 1990; Berk-Seligson, 2002).

The norm in court interpreting is often construed to be synonymous with the verbatim requirement in the legal sector. Understandably, the court is wary of any alterations by the interpreter to the original evidence given by witnesses. However, a strict verbatim requirement does not ensure effective communication across different cultures and languages. The institutional demand for accuracy in court interpreting is an objective which is often complicated, rather than facilitated, by the constraints on the professional role of the interpreter in the courtroom context.

The very restrictive role of the interpreter as a conduit, or a translation machine, may seem very fitting in order to prevent interpreters from playing a potentially intrusive role as a would-be mediator or cross-cultural consultant (Morris, 1995: 26; Marzocchi, n.d.: 97). Nonetheless, the interpreter’s role in dealing with cross-linguistic and cross-cultural issues is very important in bilingual courtroom proceedings. The interpreter should act to facilitate communication in the courtroom between speakers from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (D’Argaville, 1991; Laster and Taylor, 1994; Gentile et al., 1996). This facilitator model for the role of the court interpreter is regarded as a fuller and more elaborate view of communication, which embraces both verbal and non-verbal messages and also addresses the cultural dimension of human interaction. This model recognizes the latitude of interpreters based on the expertise of interpreters (Laster and Taylor, 1994: 126–127). However, there is some confusion over the use of the term “facilitator”, and maintaining such a position is not without some controversy.

There is apprehension that such a facilitative role might undermine the central norms of accuracy and the impartiality of the court interpreter when the court interpreter concentrates on comprehension more than faithful rendition of original utterances (e.g. González et al., 1991; Mikkelson, 1998: 22, 2000: 39; Hale, 2004: 10, 2008: 112–114). There is also the possibility that interpreters serving as “facilitators” may overstep their bounds when there is a lack of training and a lack of uniformity in the entry requirements to the profession.

Determining when to intervene is not simple, but one may argue that interpreters should be on the alert for cultural and linguistic pitfalls that would create possible misunderstanding; it is
also argued that when interpreters face interpreting problems arising out of cross-linguistic/cultural issues, they may have to interrupt the proceedings at times and draw attention to themselves in order to provide an accurate and faithful rendition (Lee, 2009a, 2009b; Hale, 2010). Not disclosing linguistic or cultural issues relevant to meaning may have the effect of impeding or distorting communication in the courtroom (see Lee, 2009b). A complexity arising from this dilemma is that the onus on determining the gravity of any potential miscommunication rests solely with the interpreter, who is often the only bilingual in legal proceedings.

Moreover, a faithful rendition of original utterances, given the grammatical and syntactical differences between languages involved in interpreting and the pressure the interpreter is under to provide immediate oral interpretation, is not a simple task which any interpreter can complete. The issue of untranslatability or inaccuracy of interpretation will inevitably arise in the course of interpreting because of the lack of equivalent words and concepts in different languages and different legal systems. When the interpreters do not alert the court to such issues, the other courtroom participants may not know whether or not the inconsistency or the lack of logic in the interpreted evidence is related to problems occurring in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communications.

Preservation of styles of original utterances in court interpreting is stressed to the extent that non-fluency features, which are often edited out by interpreters in conference settings, are considered important, and listener-oriented qualities such as comprehensibility, coherence, and clarity are by and large considered less important. Nonetheless, double standards can be found when it comes to the norms in court interpreting. The court, which expects the verbatim requirement to be met in court interpreting, also considers in fact the clarity, responsiveness, and coherence of the interpreted renditions as criteria by which to judge the adequacy of interpreting, largely because it cannot judge the key aspect of accuracy in interpreted renditions (Perera v. Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (1999) FCA 507 para [41]). The professional norms that can be found in the Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibilities of NAJIT also indicate that the interpreted rendition should sound natural, while conserving all the elements of the original message accommodating the syntactic and semantic patterns of the target language. The implications of such apparently complex norms for court interpreting are significant, because the court interpreter may feel tempted to shy away from faithful renditions of unresponsive answers, or ambiguous/incoherent remarks, or ungrammatical utterances of CALD witnesses as a means to avoid suspicion or mistrust in regard to their own professional competence.

**Research findings**

Most empirical studies of court interpreting have shed light on the current state of affairs, often suggesting potential implications for legal proceedings. Numerous studies, including Berk-Seligson’s seminal work *The Bilingual Courtroom* (2002), have demonstrated that interpreters fail to conserve the propositional content and the pragmatic effect of the witnesses’ original utterances and thus unwittingly influence courtroom examinations in one way or another. Such deviations from the norm in court interpreting may be attributed to their lack of awareness of such norms or of the communicative needs of CALD witnesses. Studies indicate that interpreters frequently simplify complex questions and shift the register of lawyers’ and judges’ questions in order to facilitate comprehension of witnesses from CALD backgrounds. They often modify the pragmatic force of speech in terms of politeness, ambiguity, and reported speech without fully realizing the potential implications for legal proceedings, (e.g. Jansen, 1995; Pym, 1999; Rigney, 1999; Berk-Seligson, 2002; Jacobsen, 2003, 2008; Hale, 2004; Lee, 2009a, 2009b, 2010;
Angermeyer, 2009). As a result of the interpreters’ modifications, CALD defendants and/or witnesses may appear more or less polite, or more or less certain or detailed in their recollection than originally intended, which may influence the impression of the listeners. Since the jury and judges take into account one’s demeanour and manner of speech, as well as the content (e.g. Conley et al., 1978; Wodak-Engel, 1984; Penman, 1990; Hale, 2004), the interpreters should provide faithful renditions of the original utterances, and elements of ambiguity or polysemy should be handled with the utmost care (Lee, 2009a; Ng, 2013a).

As discussed earlier, different modes of interpreting are deployed in court interpreting. The appropriate mode of interpreting at different stages of proceedings should be chosen for the sake of facilitating accurate and complete renditions, because it may influence the quality of interpreting and the courtroom interactions. Jacobsen (2012) finds that Danish interpreters’ preference for interpreting in whisper mode, which is condoned by courts, causes information loss and incomplete translation during the dialogue in courtroom proceedings. Lee (2012) demonstrates that the court’s lack of understanding of interpreting hinders accurate interpreting through an illustrative example in which inaccurate summary interpreting was largely due to delayed interpreting. Because the interpreter was given a chance to interpret for a CALD defendant only after many turns had lapsed during the examination of his co-defendant, where simultaneous interpreting was more appropriate, information loss and mixed persons in the interpretation resulted. When legal professionals, including judges, are not aware of the various modes of interpreting and the process involved, turn taking between interpreters and the other participants may not occur in a way that is most conducive to accurate and immediate interpreting. Therefore, both legal professionals and interpreting professionals need to cooperate to ensure full and complete provision of interpreting during the proceedings.

While many studies have focused on less than satisfactory performances of court interpreters, some studies have investigated top-level interpreters (Martin and Taibi, 2012; Lee in submission). Martin and Taibi (2012) examine high-profile court interpreting which engaged experienced conference interpreters. Their study highlights the interpreters’ awareness and confidence about their professional role and capacity, which heightened the awareness of other court professionals with regard to interpreting. Lee (in submission) analyses the meta-discourse in interpreter-mediated expert witness examinations and points to expertise in interpreting expert testimony, which then contributes to efficient resolution of interpreting issues and accurate interpretation of expert testimony.

In recent years, researchers based in non-English speaking countries in Europe and Asia have started to contribute to a growing body of literature on court interpreting (e.g. Jacobsen, 2008, 2012; Martin and Taibi, 2012; Mizuno, 2008; Leung and Gibbons, 2008, 2009; Ng, 2013a, 2013b; Lee 2012, 2014, 2015, in submission). Even now, a large portion of court interpreting centres on language combinations involving English, but research into court interpreting involving non-English languages is expected to expand our understanding of diverse cross-linguistic and cross-cultural problems posed in court interpreting.

Future directions

Countries which have seen increasing demand for court interpreting over the years are looking for models from abroad. The existing body of literature may serve as a guide for them in formulating and establishing good practices. However, regardless of the developmental stage of each country, all countries need to make further efforts to enhance professional standards in court interpreting based on the recognition that quality impacts equal access to justice and a fair trial. As evidenced in the U.K. in recent years (see Kaszyca, 2012), when cost-efficiency is prioritized at
the expense of service quality, declining professional standards and quality in the practice of court interpreting occurs, which may easily roll back years of progress toward the professionalization of court interpreting.

Another topic that deserves more scholarly attention is remote interpreting, which includes telephone interpreting and video-conferencing (see Chapter 22 on remote interpreting). Remote interpreting is very efficient in utilizing a limited supply of court interpreters in widely dispersed courtrooms. With an objective of improving cost-effectiveness and timely access to qualified interpreters, countries such as the U.S., U.K, Australia, and Canada have used remote interpreting on a limited scale, and telephone interpreting has been used selectively in short court sessions, mainly non-evidentiary procedures in the U.S. The EU is considering the use of remote interpreting as a part of the E-justice project. However, empirical data suggest that technical problems may complicate the interpreting process and impact the quality of interpreter-mediated communication (Braun and Taylor, 2012; Fowler, 2013). Before any large-scale implementation of remote interpreting in legal proceedings takes place, many questions need to be answered, such as how technological mediation through video-conferencing affects the quality of interpreting and courtroom communication in general, and whether remote interpreting is appropriate in legal proceedings which are aimed at evidence and information gathering and decision making (Braun and Taylor, 2012: 1). Further empirical research needs to be conducted to assess the impact of remote interpreting on the quality of interpreting performance in legal settings, and a proper set of rules and guidelines should be developed for procedures and technical requirements.

Shortages of interpreters in minority languages or rare languages are chronic problems in all countries, including countries which have a relatively long history of court interpreting. Given that speakers of minority languages should not be placed at a greater disadvantage merely because of the unavailability of competent interpreters, interpreter trainers and researchers should seek collaboration with international and domestic authorities in order to promote the training of interpreters from such linguistic backgrounds. Above all, government funding and collaboration with non-government organizations (NGOs) are crucial to training interpreters of languages of limited diffusion. Minority language interpreter training programs, which are often non-language specific, deserve scholarly attention in order to share know-how and accumulated experience in selecting qualified students, staffing, and materials development (see Lai and Mulayim, 2014). More research needs to be done to explore effective teaching and training methods for such rare language groups.

Further reading

This book serves well as a practical guidebook and reference for prospective court interpreters, particularly for those planning to work in the U.S. justice system.

Based on a case study set against ICTY, this paper effectively describes the role translation and interpreting plays in international justice.

This paper provides an analysis of face-work when miscommunication arises in interpreter-mediated courtroom examinations. Illustrative examples demonstrate that a part of the habitus of the interpreter is to engage with issues of face.


Discussing some landmark cases ranging from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century, this paper reveals a gradual change in attitudes toward court interpreters and their roles.

References


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**13**

**INTERPRETING IN ASYLUM PROCEEDINGS**

*Sonja Pöllabauer*

**Introduction**

This contribution outlines specific characteristics of interpreting in asylum proceedings. It starts with a brief definition of terms and an overview of early developments. Aspects that are addressed in detail are the rationale behind and format of asylum interviews, modes of interpreting, interpreter role and training, language choice in asylum interviews, and linguistic, cultural and psychological specifics of interpreting in asylum hearings. The article concludes with an assessment of future directions and suggestions for further reading.

**Definition of terms**

According to the 1951 United Nations Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the concomitant 1967 Protocol, which are key documents of international humanitarian law and have currently been signed by 142 signatory states, the term *refugee* applies to any person who

... owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

*(Article 1 A(2))*

Under international refugee law, individuals in fear of persecution have the right to apply for refugee status (asylum) in a host country. The 1951 UN Geneva Convention was originally drafted to facilitate the repatriation of refugees after WWII and was later expanded by the 1967 protocol to remove geographic restrictions and accommodate the increasingly challenging global migration situation. Though specific points have changed over the years, the basic tenets of the Convention still apply. Next to international legal instruments, most countries also have their own national asylum-specific legislation.
Proceedings to determine refugee status (asylum proceedings) have been established in many countries worldwide, though the industrialized nations receive the highest percentage of applications. According to recent statistics released by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 479,300 asylum applications were recorded in 44 industrialized nations in 2012, with the US receiving the largest share of claims, followed by Germany, France, Sweden, and the UK. Dominant source countries in 2012 were Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Serbia and Kosovo, China, and Pakistan. Even if these numbers only offer a glimpse into the current geopolitical situation and are subject to rapid change, they nonetheless indicate that a large number of individuals leave their home countries every year to seek protection in a foreign country for fear of persecution – and this is where interpreters come into play.

History/early developments
Interpreters have been required since time immemorial to ensure understanding between different language speaking parties. The professionalization of interpreting as a fully-fledged line of work has started only after WWII, when conference interpreting gradually turned into a field of practice with many features of an established profession (see Chapter 1). The need for interpreting in asylum proceedings began to increase with the adoption of the 1951 Geneva Convention and related legal instruments, first mostly in industrialized, countries and later also in others, which had adopted the Convention. In some countries, professionalization of interpreting in asylum proceedings is nonetheless still lagging behind that of other fields of interpreting if aspects such as quality assurance, interpreter training and consensus regarding the role of interpreters in asylum proceedings are taken as a yardstick.

Asylum interpreting did not become a focus of interpreting research until much later: the first (more or less) academic publications on asylum interpreting date back to the 1980s, with a slow rise of publications in the 1990s. Only after 2000 has increased attention been paid to that specific field of interpreting research and practice.

Current situation/trends
Interpreters play an essential role in asylum interviews (also referred to as hearings, interrogations or tribunals). Asylum applicants (also referred to as asylum seekers or claimants) more often than not do not speak and adequately understand the host country’s official language(s). To be heard, they need to rely on an interpreter. In most countries, national legislation foresees that claimants have the right to an interpreter during all stages of the proceedings, and most hearings are conducted with the support of an interpreter. In asylum hearings interpreters are mostly needed for spoken languages, only sometimes for sign languages.

The prototypical interaction format of asylum interviews involves at least three individuals: the asylum authority official (also referred to as asylum/immigration official/officer), the applicant, and the interpreter. Sometimes other individuals may also be present: a legal representative (e.g. in the case of unaccompanied minors), a lawyer, a person of confidence (friend or relative of the applicant), or a typist (or stenographer or court reporter). In a prototypical three-party interview, interpreters assume a key role: they are in fact the only individuals present who (ideally) understand everything that is said and (should) always know what is going on. The official conducting the interview does not understand the applicant’s language (at all or well enough) and requires an interpreter to be able to communicate. Applicants, who after a presumably long and potentially life-threatening journey from persecution find themselves in an unfamiliar
and possibly scary and absurd-appearing system, perhaps feeling helpless and desperate, need interpreters in order to be heard. The interpreter may even be viewed as a reassuring individual by the applicants, representing a link to their language, culture and “home”.

**Rationale behind and format of asylum interviews**

Many applicants leave their countries in a hurry and without documents which could be used to substantiate their claims (e.g. arrest warrants, press reports, court documents) or prove their identities (e.g. personal documents such as birth certificates, ID cards, passports). The host country’s asylum and immigration authorities thus essentially have to rely on in-person interviews to establish the facts of the claim and examine the applicant’s credibility. Due to the lack of written evidence, the oral interview becomes imperative for the authorities’ decision on granting refugee status.

Contradictory and implausible statements may harm applicants’ credibility and thus their chances of being granted asylum. Concepts such as credibility, plausibility and common sense are central for the asylum determination process. The burden of proof lies mostly on the applicants: they have to corroborate their claim in the best possible way, preferably by substantiating oral accounts with written evidence, and striving for as much “believability” as possible. Critics claim that officials from a highly literate environment, where written documents and “rules of evidence” such as linearity, logic, and factuality are given prime importance, tend to view and interpret “facts” differently from applicants from cultures with a more oral tradition and different linguistic resources and narrative traditions (Blommaert and Slembrouck, 2000: 4).

The line between “truth” and “lie” may be very thin in asylum interviews: some applicants may of course deliberately not tell the truth, possibly because human traffickers may have told them what to say to meet the presumed expectations of the host country’s official system. The (deliberate or unconscious) failure to disclose all relevant facts, however, may also have other reasons which are highly culture-bound and can be related to the preservation of status or a personal image and the values of one’s own social in-group. It is a fact that “client sincerity” is not taken for granted by officials in bureaucratic encounters (Sarangi and Slembrouck, 1996: 47). This is especially true for asylum hearings: the applicants’ claims are “tested” and scrutinized in a variety of ways to establish whether they are credible. Such “credibility tests” (Scheffer, 2001: 139; my translation) include specific questions about geographic, historical, political, and cultural aspects of a specific source country; the answers are then linked to existing resources available to the officials (country reports, accounts by other applicants, country “experts”). Failure to remember names, places, geographical landmarks, political events, or incomplete and superficial knowledge about specifics of a particular country may contribute to a negative decision. Sometimes experts are called in to provide an assessment of specific facts such as age or origin: e.g. medical age assessments (dental analysis, skeletal assessment, psychological tests) to assess an individual’s chronological age, or language analyses (recording and subsequent analysis of an applicant’s language use) to assess national origin by linking individual language use to country-specific language patterns. The validity and reliability of such tests is disputed among experts (Maryns, 2006: 252), as languages cannot always be restricted to national borders, and varieties change over time and according to the speakers’ individual life trajectories.

The exact structure of asylum adjudication proceedings varies nationally, but certain elements apply to most countries. Proceedings often provide for at least two instances or levels of adjudication (sometimes more) so that applicants may appeal against negative decisions. Within EU countries applicants often have a first interview at a “Reception Centre” where the admission of their claim (or their return to a safe country responsible for their claim) is determined (Dublin Regulations). Before that first interview, fingerprints and pictures of the applicant are taken at
local police stations or immigration office. If a claim for asylum is admitted, the full interview takes place before the national asylum authorities. The applicant’s statement is usually taken down in an official written record in the host country language. In some countries, interviews are taped and recordings are later transcribed. If no recordings are made, the written records are the only evidence of the applicants’ statements and are thus of prime importance.

Even though asylum proceedings are mostly based on oral accounts of events, the proceedings entail the production of a considerable number of texts. The applicants’ “stories”, which are produced in a very specific kind of narrative (see below), are transformed and rewritten into a series of written texts (e.g. records and transcripts of the interview, notes, legal decisions) that comply with specific genre formats. This can be seen as a process of recontextualization and re-entextualization of narratives (Blommaert and Slembrouck, 2000: 18): “The story of the asylum seeker is remoulded, remodelled and re-narrated time and time again, and rather than a text it becomes a text trajectory with various phases and instances of transformation.” In spite of this highly complex process, only the final “fixed” (i.e. written) texts are used as the basis for the decision of the asylum authorities. In these texts, the original “voice” of the applicants is often no longer accessible (due to reformulations, linguistic improvements, use of a more authoritative, less “simple” code): such a “depersonalization” is a typical feature of bureaucratic proceedings. The applicants’ narrative and answers are subject to a series of often considerable modifications (Scheffer, 2001: 124–126): vague information is made more explicit, short questions and answers are summarized into longer sections and thus give the impression of an applicant who is very articulate and able to “monologize” on facts/events; mono-syllable reactions are turned into full sentences; and content that is not regarded as “important” by the officials is left out. Applicants may be required to sign the written “product” of their interviews, i.e. the record, to prove its correctness and accept “responsibility” for the content, even if they do not have much influence on the formulation of such “procedurally correct” documents. Interpreters often have to sign the final record to prove that the content is correct.

In some countries, the record is translated on-sight by the interpreter back into the applicant’s language, in some not. Such back-translations should, in principle, have a control function. Studies show, however, that the back-translation of the record, especially if there is not much time between the end of the interview and the back-translation, is no guarantee of the correctness of the content. Moreover, it cannot help to clarify misunderstandings or contradictions if similar wordings are used for the back-translation and little attention is paid to incoherencies and incomplete recordings (Kolb, 2010). Studies also show that interpreters are often unaware of the important function of the record and sometimes tend to help the officials by changing the language register used by applicants and using formulations that are deemed more adequate for such an official document (Pöllabauer, 2005: 271–273). The final record sometimes portrays a completely different kind of narrative and individual than the “living, breathing, sobbing … claimant” present during the actual interview (Barsky, 1994: 63).

**Modes of interpreting**

Interpreting in asylum hearings mostly consists of consecutive interpretation (see Chapter 6 on consecutive interpreting). Asylum interviews are characterized by a question-answer format that is typical for many bureaucratic settings and often shows parallels to police/court interrogations, where officials ask questions following a specific routine and applicants are required to deliver adequate answers to these questions. The questions may be closed questions or open questions, which call for a longer answer. Longer answers may sometimes also be translated simultaneously (chuchotage/whispered interpretation), though speakers who are not used to being interpreted
may feel confused if the interpreter uses whispered interpretation (see Chapter 5 on simultaneous interpreting). For longer stretches of talk, interpreters may also use note-taking techniques. Interpreters with no training, however, will probably not be familiar with such techniques. Even if interpreters do not fully master professional note-taking techniques, it is advisable to note down at least numbers, names or other concepts that are difficult to remember as a form of self-protection for interpreters. The few available guidelines for interpreters in asylum proceedings also advise interpreters to do so. The record and any other written material used (previous records, decisions, country-specific material, personal documents) may need to be sight translated (see Chapter 9 on sight translation).

Remote interpreting (via phone or video-conference link) is sometimes used in asylum proceedings (see Chapter 22 on remote interpreting). It is mentioned anecdotally in documents, reports or Internet sources. Interpreting studies (IS) have focused rather extensively on diverse aspects of remote interpreting, as have EU projects (e.g. AVIDICUS 1, 2), especially in court proceedings (see the AVIDICUS website, hosted by the University of Surrey, www.videoconference-interpreting.net/index.html/ – accessed 16 Oct 2014). Remote interpreting by video link is also mentioned in the new Directive 2010/64/EU on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings.

In Europe, the General Directors’ Immigration Services Conference (GDISC), an informal network to facilitate cooperation between immigration services in the region, started a project in 2007 to increase the use of remote interpreting in asylum proceedings through the establishment of a “Pool of Interpreters”. The project has now been taken over by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), an EU agency. For remote interpreting, consecutive interpreting is used (and sometimes relay interpreting through a pivot language). The use of remote interpreting within the GDISC/EASO project varies from “regularly” to “not yet used”. While GDISC representatives have described the initiative as successful, opposing views are given in a survey among member countries (Braun and Taylor, 2012: 40–45).

The Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board also conducted a feasibility study (based on interviews and questionnaires) on the use of videoconference interpreting in refugee hearings in 2004, with both positive and negative views on the potentials of video remote interpreting for asylum hearings. The study concluded that further substantial research on the use of remote interpreting in asylum proceedings was crucial (Ellis, 2004). Braun and Taylor (2012: 45) also report on a questionnaire study on the use of videoconference interpreting in British immigration bail hearings. Apart from scattered information such as these, remote interpreting still remains underrepresented when it comes to interpreting in asylum proceedings and also has not yet been sufficiently taken up by research.

**Interpreters’ role**

It is in this complex communicative setting, as outlined above, that interpreters work. Their work and conduct may have a significant influence on the outcome (positive or negative) of an applicant’s claim. Without an interpreter, adequate communication would not be possible. A faulty, erroneous translation, however, may produce contradictions in a claimant’s case and lead to the rejection of a claim, refoulement (deportation) to the source/home country and ultimately even death (due to persecution in the home country). Even though the role of interpreters in such settings is crucial in theory, practice shows that translation errors, distortions, and inappropriate and non-professional behaviour of interpreters or other interactants (e.g. rudeness, disrespect, prejudice, biased behaviour towards applicants and/or other interactants) are well documented in publications and (un)official accounts.
Principally, interpreters’ behaviour should be governed by the basic tenets set out in professional codes of conduct for interpreters, e.g. confidentiality, impartiality, cultural sensitivity, professional demeanour, and professional development (see Chapter 20 on ethics). The speakers’ original messages should be rendered fully and completely, without distortions of any kind. Principally, this also applies to asylum hearings: all parts of the conversation and any written material referred to or used (e.g. the record, previous decisions, country-specific information) should be interpreted for the respective other participants. For instance, standards outlined in an UNHCR training module for interviewing applicants for refugee status lay down that:

Interpreters should understand that everything the interviewer and applicant say must be interpreted. It is not sufficient to summarize or embellish what is being said through filling in missing information. Nor should the interpreter try to improve on the words or phrases of the applicant in order to make him or her sound more coherent, credible or educated.

(UNHCR, 1995: 5)

Accounts of individuals involved in asylum proceedings and transcripts of interviews, however, prove that interpreters assume a role in practice which may differ considerably from these basic tenets. We find a continuum of different interpreter roles and interpreter types as well as conflicting views on the role and function of interpreters, among academic scholars, the judiciary and the individuals involved in such settings.

Studies indicate, for instance, that the specific question-answer format of asylum interviews is sometimes broken down into separate conversations between only two of the participants (e.g. the applicant and the interpreter or the interpreter and the official), which are not always translated for the respective other interactants. Sometimes the content of such “sub-hearings” is simply summarized, and sometimes no translation is provided if the content is deemed irrelevant for the respective other interactant(s). Sometimes it will not always be clear to the interactants what is actually going on, especially if two-party side conversations are not translated.

Sometimes clarifying questions and separate conversations between two of the speakers, however, may be necessary to achieve understanding, e.g. if a concept or a word/phrase used is unclear to one of the speakers, or if the message is difficult to understand acoustically (accent, dialect, not loud enough, muddled pronunciation etc.). Such side conversations are considered legitimate as long as they are kept transparent: all parties need to be informed about the reasons for clarifying questions and separate conversations between two of the interactants. The content of these “sub-talks” needs to be at least summarized.

Principally, it is difficult for the other parties to assess if, in fact, “everything” has been translated by the interpreter, as the interpreter’s renditions are difficult to “control” by the other speakers: they do not have full control of what is made of their utterances. Nonetheless, certain signals may provide the main parties with a rough idea of what is going on and if there may be a case of misunderstanding (Scheffler, 2001: 45–47): length of original message in comparison to length of interpretation (if the interpretation is much longer or shorter, content may have been altered or left out); irregularities with respect to turn-taking (e.g. no answer to a question, or a question (or several) posed to the applicant (or official) by the interpreter, with no interpretation or explanation for the respective other); incongruent body language (if the content of the original messages/interpretation is not congruent with the speaker’s body language; or if very specific non-verbal signals/gestures are not rendered, e.g. applicant signals shooting by using a finger as a weapon, no mention thereof in the interpretation); sequential control of understanding (e.g. if answers do not fit with the questions or seem irrelevant, which may then lead officials to ask for
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cation); and retrospective control of understanding (e.g. the back-translation of the record, though, as mentioned, this is no guarantee for a complete and correct interpretation).

One issue with respect to the interpreter’s function, which was discussed at length by Morris with respect to court interpreting (Morris, 1995) and has also been taken up by scholars working on asylum interpreting, is the paradoxical claim, sometimes voiced by the judiciary and legal experts, that interpreters should “translate” (verbatim) without “interpreting”, as the interpretation of the meaning should be left to the legal experts. A review of the literature on asylum interpreting shows that authors with a legal/judiciary background sometimes tend to uphold this restricted role prescription, while scholars from other fields (mostly translation studies, sociology, linguistics) tend to favour a higher degree of interpreter latitude. In current IS and community interpreting (CI) research, scholars have come to the conclusion that the role of interpreters calls for more than the mere “translation” of content. Interpreters have to “interpret” utterances (i.e. infer meaning) to forge understanding, and they sometimes have to explain foreign concepts to the interactants – even coining new words – explain culturally-bound behaviour and language, and intervene if the situation is such that they cannot fulfil their task of interpreting (see Chapters 12 and 14 on court and community interpreting).

In asylum interviews, interpreters are not invisible non-persons: they are highly present participants who strive to preserve their own self-image. Traditional linear models of the role of interpreters as mere conveyors of words (language machines, conduits, or other similar metaphors have been used in such a context) are out-dated. The utopian “postman fiction” (Scheffer, 2001: 43; my translation) is in practice not feasible: interpreters do not just deliver messages between two primary interactants; they sometimes unlawfully “open”, forget or withhold “messages”.

Research on asylum hearings presents us with a number of theoretical role prescriptions and/or practical role constructions. The interpreters’ behaviour is governed by different, sometimes contradictory and conflicting norms, and the interactants’ reading of the situation may differ despite the same macro-institutional context. Even though the theoretically presumed role of interpreters as individuals who facilitate communication and help to forge understanding has a positive connotation, some do not view the role of interpreters in asylum hearings favourably: interpreters are seen as a “problem” or even “obstacle” to communication and are described as incompetent, distortional, and biased. These negative views are corroborated by (empirical) data and accounts where interpreters assume the role of “co-interrogators” or “auxiliary officers” (Donk, 2000), who indeed show biased behaviour (mostly towards the applicants) and tend to try to “help” the host country officials. Some interpreters assume such a role on their own initiative; others may be forced into such a function by the officials (Donk, 2000). Studies show, however, that due to their lack of legal expertise, interpreter-interrogators cannot always fulfil the role expectations bestowed on them. Applicants may view interpreters as being affiliated with the host country system, as “collaborators” or even “traitors”. In such a case, the applicants’ willingness to disclose all relevant facts is understandably very limited.

On the other hand, interpreters may also be seen as “helpers” by the applicants: they may be the first familiar individual in an unfamiliar setting, who is perceived as a “person of trust”. Such a view may also entail the expectation that the interpreter will help the applicant to embellish his/her statement to make it more in line with what is expected by the host country authorities.

The most latitude is granted to interpreters who are viewed as “cultural mediators”. Barsky (1994), one of the pioneers of asylum interpreting research, for instance, pleads for a role of interpreters as “intercultural agents”. Such a role as “intercultural mediators”, who have a sound knowledge of the culture not only of the host country but also the applicant’s home country and are able to bridge cultural gaps, explain and adequately interpret socio-cultural conventions,
culture-laden terms and culturally determined behaviour, is supported by many – not only scholars, but also practitioners and sometimes asylum officials. Within these less traditional views on the role of interpreters, which are also corroborated by recent findings in CI research, Barsky’s delimitation of the interpreter role can be viewed as one of the broadest. In his view, interpreters are not only required to read culturally contingent signs, clarify facts and mediate culture-specific attitudes, but also to articulate and improve (embellish) the applicants’ claim in order to compensate for intrinsic biases in the system and errors in judgement.

Another role that is sometimes ascribed to interpreters is that of “experts” or “expert witnesses”. In such a role, interpreters may be required to provide detailed information on the applicant’s home country and even assess the credibility and believability of his/her claim or conduct a “language assessment”. Even if interpreters should in theory be language and culture experts, studies have shown that interpreters in practice cannot often fulfil this requirement (due to lack of training or expertise) and that it may be dangerous for asylum authorities to goad interpreters into such a role. If interpreters are ascribed such a role, it should be made clear to all interactants that in such a case the role goes beyond interpreting.

What these different views on the role of interpreters show is that the function of interpreters in asylum proceedings is by no means clear-cut. Both research and practice confirm that the interactants in such hearings often have only a very limited idea of the interpreter’s role and highly divergent expectations that guide their behaviour vis-à-vis the interpreter. Even though some countries try to outline the role of the interpreter in handbooks or guidelines, such theoretical explanations are in practice not always observed or are sometimes not clear to the interactants. Studies also indicate that even for trained interpreters, it may be difficult to transfer into practice the theoretical role expectations laid down in professional codes of conduct, especially in more complex situations.

Training

As diverse as the different roles ascribed to interpreters in asylum settings are, so too are the background and training of the interpreters working in such settings. With respect to training, we can broadly differentiate between four groups of interpreters: interpreters with formal, full-scale interpreter training (at tertiary education institutes such as universities and colleges); interpreters with shorter training in interpreting (general or specific training courses, in-house training); sworn and court-certified interpreters (who sometimes have undergone training and sometimes not, depending on the national system of court interpreting); and interpreters with no training in interpreting. Reports indicate that all of these four groups are regularly used as interpreters in asylum hearings. As the interpreting needs for different languages may change rapidly due to the sometimes highly volatile geopolitical situation, it will not be possible to use only trained interpreters. The complex language situation in asylum hearings makes it necessary to use non-professional interpreters (i.e. with no training) for languages for which no trained interpreters are available. Countries differ, however, in the degree of awareness of the challenges of interpreting in asylum hearings and quality assurance: some countries have at least established some sort of quality assurance, with trained interpreters given preference over untrained interpreters, specific training for interpreters working in asylum hearings (and officials working with interpreters), as well as the development of specific codes of ethics or standards of behaviour for interpreters (and officials) working in such settings. For other countries, the function of interpreters is still restricted to the conduit model (see above), and not much attention is given to issues of interpreting, let alone quality assurance. Even if interpreters have undergone official training, in many countries interpreter training still mostly concentrates on conference interpreting, with little focus on the
challenges presented by other fields. This suggests that even trained interpreters may not be sufficiently prepared for the challenges of asylum interpreting.

The individual interpreters working in asylum proceedings also have different backgrounds: especially for languages of limited diffusion (LLDs) where no training is available, interpreters are sometimes migrants themselves, with a similar background as the applicants they interpret for. For other languages (especially if training is available), interpreters may also have a host country background with no deep ties to the applicants’ source countries. Reports indicate that both interpreter “types” may bring advantages and disadvantages to the communication situation. Some applicants feel more inclined to trust “migrant” interpreters with a similar background, who are viewed as a familiar person and helper in strange and unnerving surroundings; while others, on the contrary, distrust interpreters from their own home countries for fear of the interpreters being collaborators with the home country institutions or because they belong to the “wrong” ethnic group. This may be the case, for instance, when ethnic cleansing was part of the applicants’ reason for leaving their countries. Studies have shown that in such challenging interaction constellations applicants may deliberately withhold information and not disclose all relevant facts because they do not trust the interpreter. In some cases, such doubts (sometimes unfounded, sometimes well-founded) lead to an appeal based on the argument that the interpreter either distorted or wrongly translated information or that the applicant did not provide all relevant facts due to fear of the interpreter. If interpreters are, on the other hand, mainly associated with the host country, there may also be two sides of the coin: some interpreters are viewed by applicants as being more “neutral” because they are in no way associated with their home countries, which may make them more inclined to provide full information, while other interpreters are said to lack the necessary language and cultural skills to fully grasp the meaning and context of the applicants’ statements. Studies indicate that interpreters who are primarily socialized in the host country society sometimes lack the necessary social and cultural knowledge about the applicants’ home countries and fail to function as “cultural mediators” (Pöllabauer, 2005: 417–419).

**Language choice and varieties**

In most countries, applicants do not necessarily have the right to be interviewed in their mother tongue if the interview is conducted in a language they “understand”. Even the European Convention on Human Rights, which was adopted by the Council of Europe, states in Article 5(2): “Everyone who is arrested shall be informed promptly, in a language which he understands, of the reasons for his arrest and of any charge against him” (italics added).

Language choice, however, is an important factor in asylum proceedings and may determine how adequately applicants can express their claims, and how well they are interpreted. Sometimes applicants are multilingual, e.g. applicants from countries with several official languages. Sometimes linguistic choice is left to the applicants, who can state in which language they want to be interviewed. Sometimes language use is determined by the asylum authorities, depending on the availability of interpreters for specific language combinations. If officials and applicants have a common lingua franca, they may sometimes decide not to use an interpreter, though this seems to be the exception. Applicants who speak more than one language most probably do not have the same level of language skills in all of these languages. Sometimes they can only rely on informally acquired skills in one language. If they are required to use a specific language, poor linguistic skills may have a negative influence on how well they are able to express themselves and ultimately how well the interpreters understand them.

In other cases, applicants may be unwilling to use a specific language but be forced to do so due to a lack of interpreters in their preferred language, or because language use is decided...
by the authorities. Languages that are considered the language of the “enemy” may be especially disliked by applicants, e.g. in cases where applicants and interpreters come from antagonist language/ethnic groups. For instance, this may be the case with Chechens interviewed in Russian (currently a common practice in many European countries) or was the case with applicants from the former Yugoslavia where antagonism between Bosnians, Croatians, and Serbians sometimes led applicants to distrust speakers from the respective other ethnic groups.

The acceptance of specific non-standard language varieties (or lack thereof) and the preference for monolingual standard varieties is also a factor in asylum proceedings (Maryns, 2006: 200–202). Pidgin or creole languages are often not viewed as “adequate” languages that qualify for such proceedings. Speakers of such languages are thus forced to assimilate to some other standard variety spoken in their home country. This, for instance, often seems to be the case with African languages and English. Interpreters who have been trained in one standard variety of a language (e.g. with English, mostly British or American English) may also have problems understanding other varieties of that language (e.g. African English varieties) and thus have problems, as studies have shown, translating certain concepts or words or even fully understanding the speakers. Speakers with a repertoire that is more similar to the standard varieties used by interpreters and host country officials may have better chances of being heard.

**Linguistic aspects**

The language used by the applicants may differ greatly from the language used in other interpreting settings (with respect to register, non-standard varieties, or code-switching), especially if the applicants have a linguistic and cultural background that the interpreter is not familiar with and/or use a language that is not their mother tongue and may have been acquired in an informal setting as a lingua franca. Some applicants may also be illiterate, which has an influence on oral narratives and the accounting of events. Often applicants adopt a hesitant style, with self-corrections, abrupt changes of topic or footing, and missing or incorrect cohesive links and markers. Narratives may also be very dense, with much information squeezed into small passages. Grammatical, lexical, and syntactical errors are frequent if applicants are not mother-tongue speakers of a language (e.g. problems with lexical selection, verb inflection, tense marking, aspect marking, use of pronouns etc.). For interpreters who are often professionally (and personally) socialized in a Western, industrialized and highly literate world, such narratives may be difficult to understand. Pronunciation may also differ from what they are used to, and applicants often use non-standard varieties with strong accents. Blommaert (2001: 423), however, maintains that in spite of limited language proficiency the narratives of such applicants show a particular pattern of coherence, which he refers to as “ethnocoherence”: in spite of language errors and simplistic language use, applicants’ narratives show complex patterns of effecting coherence to contextualize events and explain motives. Such patterns are, however, difficult to detect by non-specialists.

Accounts in asylum hearings are sometimes also a very specific form of contextualizing local, social, political or personal circumstances. This form of narrative can be called “home narrative” (Blommaert, 2001: 428). Home narratives are highly complex, with often unexpected sequential and cohesive patterns of narration. Specific spatial and temporal structures are used to frame and contextualize events and arguments. For listeners who are not used to such accounts, these may appear confusing and muddled. For interpreters, such home narratives may be very difficult to understand and translate. An apparently fragmented and non-cohesive manner of talk may also have implications for the assessment of an individual’s trustworthiness. Seemingly illogical or contradictory arguments may be interpreted as implausible (a “lie”).
Overlapping talk and irregular turn-taking (i.e. turn-taking that does not comply with the standard question-answer format) may also prove difficult for interpreters: in such cases they need very specific strategies to coordinate talk and make sure they are able to interpret all utterances.

The same applies to the use of politeness markers: the lack of politeness markers or different politeness strategies (both verbally and non-verbally) may have negative consequences for the assessment of an applicant’s claim. The same also applies to hedges (expressions used to weaken the illocutionary impact of an utterance): the excessive use of hedging is associated with a “powerless” style and may make speakers appear less confident of what they say. If interpreters change politeness signals/hedges (omit them or introduce additional markers), they may change the illocutionary content of an utterance and ultimately the evaluation of an individual (see for instance Berk-Seligson, 2002; Hale, 2004; Jacobsen, 2008).

Shifting forms of address used by the participants (i.e. addressing the opposite directly (“you”) or indirectly (“s/he”)) may sometimes also pose a problem and require specific interpreter strategies: by changing the form of address interpreters can make questions more specific, signal the authorship of an utterance, reformulate utterances in a less face-threatening way or detach themselves from the situation.

Another structural element of asylum hearings is code-switching and language mixing (Maryns and Blommaert, 2001: 69): speakers do not use only one language but change between languages; these alterations may be motivated by preference for one language for a specific purpose, by linguistic constraints, or non-deliberate, automated processing functions. Often applicants do not speak “one” language but use a continuum of different variants of that language. Interactants may sometimes feel motivated to change to a different language to either demonstrate that they are able to get the gist of what is said (e.g. as a demonstration of power by the official) or to demonstrate willingness to adapt (to the host country). Code-switching on the part of applicants may prove difficult for interpreters as words/phrases that are suddenly incorporated into the dominant language may not be pronounced or used correctly and can be difficult to understand. If officials switch into the applicant’s language, interpreters are given a control function (does s/he understand and ultimately record correctly what has been said) and at the same time are faced with the decision whether to continue to translate or withdraw into a stand-by position. The use of a limited repertoire of linguistic expressions that are available to the applicants is especially prone to errors and misunderstandings (see for instance González et al., 2012: 712–713).

Cultural aspects

One aspect closely related to language use is the cultural relativity of specific concepts and words/phrases (Kälin, 1986: 233–235). Applicants often use highly culture-specific words or refer to culture-bound concepts that may be difficult to understand for both the interpreter and the officials. Culture-specificity cannot only pose a problem for the discussion of abstract, philosophical or religious concepts, but can also occur with the use of seemingly unproblematic words/phrases. The interpretation of such concepts against the background of one’s own (interpreter, official) cultural framework and/or the lack of awareness of such differences may be a major source of misunderstandings. Interpreters may not always be aware of culture-specific manners of expression (especially if they do not have the same cultural background as the applicants) or may have problems transferring certain concepts into the respective other language. Culture-bound expressions may call for more detailed explanations or longer translations by the interpreter (some concepts can only be conveyed through an explanation or paraphrasing) or entail a higher need
for clarification. Different concepts of the self/individual or family, (unintentional) bias in interpreting the arguments of the applicants on the part of officials, different concepts of logic or “common sense” (including mention of concepts from the realm of magic, voodoo, or animistic religious concepts), different values and value expectations, different perceptions of time and space, or the cultural relativity of the concepts of “lie” and “truth” may all be sources of misunderstandings and ultimately for the rejection of a claim based on alleged contradictions.

Even though many asylum officials receive training on such issues, reports and studies signal that culture-specific concepts, nonetheless, often pose a problem to understanding. Some interpreters, especially if they have been socialized and trained in a Western context, may not be aware of these aspects or have also lost their tolerance of and sensitivity for speakers with a different cultural horizon. Next to concepts used by the applicants, culture-bound words and terms used by the officials (e.g. political terms, legal terms) may be difficult to transfer into the applicants’ language due to a lack of corresponding expressions or a different (legal, social, religious) system. Maryns and Blommaert (2002: 13) have described such linguistic and cultural inequalities using the notion of “pretextuality” and “pretextual gaps”: pretextuality refers to the preconditions that influence our communicative behaviour: “socially preconditioned knowledge articulated in speakers’ … assessment of what is meaningful in the interaction combined with his/her capacity to anticipate what is required.” Pretextual gaps are differences in such preconditions. Applicants’ stories often fail to meet the “procedural-discursive” expectations of the officials as they neither correspond to expected patterns and requirements of narrating, contextualizing, and explaining events, nor expected requirements of clarity, fluency, coherence, logic, consistency, presentation of evidence etc. Their stories may thus be dismissed as meaningless.

**Psychological aspects**

Another aspect of asylum hearings is that they are often characterized by a high degree of emotionality: applicants tell stories of sometimes unbelievable horrors and cruelties, they have to report on and make believable the “unspeakable”, and all other interactants have to find a way to cope with such traumatizing narratives. In such situations, interpreters are highly involved in the situation, sitting perhaps only a short distance from a traumatized, sobbing, and desperate applicant.

Some applicants are considered especially “vulnerable” groups. For these groups, including for instance children and unaccompanied minors, traumatized or mentally ill individuals, victims of torture, rape or any other form of psychological, physical or sexual violence, UNHCR guidelines call for specific sensitivity and special interview techniques. Basically, specific age, gender and cultural sensitivity should apply to all asylum interviews according to the UNHCR Procedural Standards. National asylum authorities are also advised to have a sufficient number of both male and female staff members, so applicants can be interviewed by either male or female officials. This may be imperative in cases where sexual abuse or violence is an issue and a woman may not be able to open up to a male official (and male interpreter) or vice versa. In such cases, the interpreter’s gender may also be highly relevant.

In the last few years UNHCR projects have also focused on specific interview techniques and procedural standards for interviewing minors (Guidelines for Child Asylum Claims), outlining child-specific rights and child-related manifestations of persecution. Children and unaccompanied minors (UAMs) are a specifically vulnerable group with rising numbers of asylum claims according to EU statistics. The role of the interpreter in such fragile settings has recently been discovered to be crucial for the successful implementation of such specific interviewing techniques.
Another group that has recently been listed as a group at risk are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons, who are often targeted in some countries. Increasing attention has been paid to claims relating to sexual orientation and gender identity. Both interviewers and interpreters need to show extra sensitivity in such cases.

One specific aspect when working in settings with a high degree of emotionality is the interpreters’ personal emotional stability: interpreters may have a similar background and have experienced similar situations as the applicants they have to translate for. In extreme cases, hearing and translating such narratives may lead to the re-traumatization (secondary traumatization) of interpreters. That phenomenon, which is often discussed with respect to interpreters working in transcultural psychotherapy, may also pose a problem for interpreters in asylum settings (see Chapter 21 on vicarious trauma).

These are all aspects which are hardly present in the interpreting literature but where interpreters may have a considerable influence on the success of such interviews: if interpreters are not sensitive enough towards or not able to implement specific interview standards and techniques, such interviews will be prone to fail. Additional specific training for both officials and interpreters is necessary for such contexts (and is already provided to a certain extent to officials in some countries, e.g. by EASO).

Future directions

What we can conclude from this overview of the diverse facets of asylum interpreting is that more attention should be paid to aspects such as quality assurance, which is practically non-existent in some countries, and interpreter training. Training providers on all levels should make sure that interpreters are well prepared for this demanding setting. A broader consensus needs to be achieved on the most adequate format, length, and content of such specific training. The establishment of train-the-trainer initiatives might also prove worthwhile. Against this backdrop, special attention should also be paid to delimiting the role of interpreters in asylum proceedings, which still remains fuzzy in many countries. The languages required in asylum proceedings also make it necessary to discuss the best possible preparation of natural (i.e. untrained) interpreters for such settings (see Chapter 26 on non-professional interpreters). The integration of all central stakeholders in this process seems paramount. Specific topics that will probably be more prominent in the future are the challenges of interpreting for especially vulnerable groups, and possibly the increased use of remote interpreting for asylum settings.

Further reading


Pioneering, concise and critical discussion of discursive aspects of asylum interviews and the role of interpreters.


Theorizes aspects of asylum interpreting based on Bourdieu’s concepts of field and habitus.


One of the earliest publications on the topic, with a strong focus on cultural, anthropological aspects.

Provides a detailed insight in discursive processes in the asylum process, based on empirical data.


Discussion of different aspects of interpreting in asylum hearings, based on empirical data.

**References**


Introduction

The historical roots of the profession

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

(Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 2)

Access to translation and interpreting in public service settings is a natural, human right to be guaranteed. Failure to enforce it may endanger the life and the well-being of millions of people while perpetuating a social landscape where everyone is not equal.

(European Commission, 2011:21)

Community interpreting is founded on a simple concept: giving a voice to those who seek access to basic services but do not speak the societal language.

As a profession, community interpreting weds issues of language and culture to concepts of social justice and equity. Most of those who support the profession share the conviction that it has a mandate to facilitate access to community services for individuals who do not speak, read, write or understand the language of service well enough to have meaningful access to that service without interpreters (Zimányi, 2009:19–20).

Underlying this assumption is the core understanding that although we may all have a human right to community services, adequate access to those services is fundamentally impractical or impossible without professional interpreters: that is, trained, qualified interpreters – and not family, friends, a cafeteria worker or someone in the waiting room who happens to speak the language.

Key issues

This chapter proposes to provide an overview of the profession, from its historical roots to its current controversies. It will address some of the key issues that dominate the field, including:
Why the field is called community interpreting
The driving forces that have shaped the profession, such as language access laws
Whether legal interpreting is properly part of community interpreting or an autonomous profession (and why international tensions surround this question)
Why the “role” of the interpreter is the profession’s most controversial question
Whether cultural mediation is part of the community interpreter’s mandate or an autonomous profession
Training and education concerns
Best practices

Definition of key terms

Community interpreting: one profession, many names

The very name of this profession invites controversy and has led to heated discussions. Many individuals and even nations have repudiated the term “community interpreting”, a label for the profession that first found coinage in Australia in the 1970s (Chesher, 1997). It then gained traction as a common international term for the profession (Pöchhacker, 1999).

Soon, other terms for the profession proliferated around the world. Some countries such as the UK or Spain have adopted one term – “public service interpreter” – and then found that the term “community interpreter” has come into use to describe less qualified interpreters who perform the same work as public service interpreters.

To add to this confusion, quite a number of other names are also used to refer to the profession (see e.g., Mikkelson, 1996a; Furmanek, 1992; Hrehovčik, 2009). Not all those terms share the same meaning across countries and not all of them consistently refer to community interpreting. The terms include:

- Public service interpreting
- Liaison interpreting
- Bilateral interpreting
- Dialogue interpreting
- Community-based interpreting
- Bidirectional interpreting
- Triangle interpreting
- Cultural interpreting
- Cultural (or intercultural) mediation
- Consecutive interpreting (even though “consecutive” is, properly speaking, an interpreting mode)
- Contact interpreting
- Face-to-face interpreting
- Triad interpreting
- Discourse interpreting
- Social or intra-social interpreting
- Language mediation

By 2010, when the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) language subcommittee met in Dublin to pursue the development of the first international standard for community
interpreting (now approved as ISO International Standard 13611 and in press as of 2014), the name itself became a concern. Many of the 29 countries with participating member delegations had to decide what to call the profession, and it was no easy task. A distaste among many around the world for the word “community” in “community interpreting” partly reflects a concern that this word is often associated with unprofessional or unqualified interpreters. For example, a highly respected U.S. work on court interpreting stated in 1991 that “Community interpreting refers to any interpretation provided by non-professional interpreters” (González et al., 1991:29; note that the second edition of that work in 2012 omitted this statement.) In addition, the term “community” is sometimes confused with the term “European Community”.

In the end, ISO has adopted the term “community interpreting” for the title of the first truly international standard for the profession. It is still the most widely used term today and likely to remain so.

**Defining community interpreting**

There is no internationally accepted definition for community interpreting. One clear definition suggests that “Community interpreting serves to enable individuals or groups in society who do not speak the official or dominant language to access basic services and communicate with service providers” (Shlesinger 2011:6). Most definitions of the term usually refer in one way or another to interpreting that supports access to community services. Many practitioners would prefer the term to include only “professional” interpreting to distinguish it from the prevalent informal practice of letting unqualified individuals perform it.

Community interpreting distinguishes itself from other interpreting professions, including conference, media, escort and military interpreting, by its focus on access to services and some of the specific techniques used, whether face-to-face or via telephone or video. Differences of technique include:

- A focus on bilateral interpreting (question-and-answer)
- An emphasis on consecutive mode
- The complexity and challenges of the human, social and economic relationships at stake
- The degree of sanctioned interpreter involvement
- The socio-economic status of the participants and the interpreter’s need to navigate imbalances of power and control

**Defining other terms**

The following terms are commonly used in community interpreting.

**Language access**

The use of language services or language assistance to enable or help an individual who does not speak, read, write or understand the language of service to obtain meaningful access to that service.

**Language access law**

A law or statute that mandates equal access to public services through the use of qualified language assistance.
**Ad hoc interpreting**
Interpreting performed by untrained, unqualified individuals who may be family, friends, untrained bilingual staff, volunteers, community advocates or anyone who claims to speak two languages. An emerging term for this concept is “informal interpreting”.

**Legal interpreting**
“Interpreting related to legal processes and proceedings, including but not limited to lawyer-client representation, prosecutor-victim/witness interviews and law enforcement communications” (Framer et al. 2010:xii). (Although many feel that legal interpreting is part of community interpreting because it facilitates access to justice, many others disagree, particularly in the case of court interpreting. Legal interpreting is a broad field: court interpreting is only part of it. See Chapter 12 on legal interpreting.)

**Medical/healthcare interpreting**
Interpreting in healthcare settings for patients, their families and healthcare staff. (Note that in this chapter “medical interpreting” and “healthcare interpreting” are used interchangeably, reflecting general usage. See Chapter 15 on healthcare interpreting.)

**Service provider**
Someone who offers a community service, whether in public, private or non-profit settings.

**Service user (also known as a client)**
An individual who needs interpreting in order to gain meaningful access to a community service.

**Historical perspectives**

**History of the field**
While many would describe community interpreting as one of the world’s oldest practices, there is an informal consensus that, after its beginnings in Australia in the 1970s, professional community interpreting spread to parts of Europe and later to the U.S., Canada and then other nations. In fact, it appears to have evolved at around the same time in both Australia and Sweden (Wande, 1994 and Niska, 2004). Community interpreter training began in Sweden in 1968 (Hein, 2009:125). As Moody (2011:38–39) reports, anti-discrimination laws passed in Australia in the 1970s mandated access to services such as education, health care and social services to aboriginal peoples, linguistic minorities, and immigrants. Then in Sweden by the mid-1970s, local governments routinely hired interpreters for both spoken and signed languages in medical, legal, religious, and educational settings.

The growing interest in community interpreting led to the 1995 First International Conference on Interpreting in Legal, Health, and Social Service Settings at Geneva Park near Toronto, Canada. This conference marked the historic beginning of Critical Link, now Critical Link International, the leading non-governmental organization (NGO) that supports community interpreting around the world. Critical Link International also hosts the largest international conference in the field (www.criticallink.org – accessed 16 Oct 2014), held every three years.
Since that time, community interpreting has often been considered the “stepsister” or “poor relation” or of other interpreting professions (Mason, 2001). Today it is rapidly professionalizing: perhaps community interpreting is a Cinderella story, for it has sparked an outpouring of recent activity and research around the world. A decade ago, only conference or sign language interpreting could be found in most parts of Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. Today, community interpreting is developing rapidly in many nations, a growing number of local, national and international associations support it, and it has inspired a swiftly expanding body of research (Vargas Urpi, 2012).

The urgent expansion arises because community interpreting has evolved largely in response to two often co-existing needs: the need for interpreters for native-born and indigenous populations, including the deaf and hard of hearing, aboriginal populations and minority language speakers; and the need for interpreters for migrant or immigrant populations, including refugees and asylees. Globalization and migration are strong driving forces as well.

Although many view community interpreting as a profession focused on serving immigrants, sign language interpreting has emerged as a highly professionalized activity in a number of countries, as the work of the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (www.wasli.org – accessed 16 Oct 2014) and the accreditation board of the Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education attests. Regarding interpreting for indigenous populations, it is of course important in countries, such as many in Africa, where hundreds of languages may be spoken. Yet such interpreting has also been important in countries in North and South America. In Canada, the profession first evolved from interpreting practised in the 1960s for indigenous populations (Kaufert and Koolage, 1984), albeit under the rubric “cultural interpreting,” a term repudiated in Canada today in favour of “community interpreting” (Canadian national standards for community interpreting also prohibit culture brokering; cf. HIN, 2007).

**Specializations and settings**

In contrast to laypersons, interpreting specialists often view community interpreting as a profession defined not by the settings where it is practised but by its mission of facilitating access to community services (International Organization for Standardization, in press).

It is important to consider that while community interpreting facilitates access to community services, it is also often defined by its specializations and the settings in which it is practised. These specializations include medical, mental health, educational, social services, faith-based and legal interpreting (see Chapters 12, 15, 16 and 17 in this volume).

In addition to the specializations discussed above, however, community interpreters work in such a broad array of settings that it would require a whole chapter to list them. In health care, the settings can range from hospitals to health departments, clinics and roving medical vans. In human services, they can encompass any service imaginable, from sexual assault, domestic violence and homeless shelters to suicide hotlines, food assistance, employment counselling and services to persons with disabilities. Faith-based interpreting could entail interpreting for home or visiting pastors, chaplain visits, religious education, prayer, hospice or funeral services. Educational interpreting takes place in settings such as schools, preschools, colleges and training programs.

It is often unclear whether a given setting involves community interpreting or not. Is interpreting for an immigrant who is asking to open a personal bank account an example of business or community interpreting – or both? Is a soldier who interprets to facilitate a food delivery to a village isolated by war a community interpreter or a military interpreter? Furthermore, in some cases, such as the courts, there is no clear consensus on whether the court interpreter is a community interpreter or not.
For all these reasons, it is preferable to define community interpreting by its focus on facilitating access to community services rather than by the broad array of settings where it takes place.

**Driving forces**

The key driving forces that have helped to establish community interpreting as a profession are:

- Migration
- Language policy and language access laws and regulations
- Professional associations and groups
- Individual and public welfare concerns
- Liability and litigation

The estimated number of international migrants in the world reached 214 million in 2010, and this number is predicted to increase (United Nations, 2012). As a result, wherever migrants do not speak the official or societal language(s), the need for language assistance has grown urgent.

The expectation that migrants should “just learn the language” of their new country is not realistic in the short term. No one can learn a language overnight. The work of U.S. federal language training specialists at the Defense Language Institute (part of the U.S. Department of Defense and possibly the largest language training centre in the world) suggests that the average adult learner requires 3,000 to 5,000 hours of study and practice to attain fluency in another language, depending on factors such as age, education and prior languages spoken. Thus, wherever migrants live, community interpreting will be a vital way to help them access basic human services until they can communicate fluently in the societal language.

In great part because of this increased migration, language access is addressed in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, and in national language laws for the European Union and in many other countries around the world. (For an overview of such laws, see du Plessis, 2011.) Such laws may specify certain prioritized languages (South Africa, for example, has 11 official languages) or may be general in scope. They may address specific services such as health care: for example, the WHO Declaration on the Promotion of Patients’ Rights states in article 2.4 that “Information must be communicated to the patient in a way appropriate to the latter’s capacity for understanding, minimizing the use of unfamiliar technical terminology. If the patient does not speak the common language, some form of interpreting should be available” (World Health Organization, 1994:10). Inevitably, it appears, where language access laws exist, the impact on the professionalization of community interpreting is significant (Pöchhacker, 1999).

Yet professional interpreters cost money and require training, support and advocacy. Many professional interpreter associations and groups, large and small, including Critical Link International, the International Federation of Translators (FIT) and the International Association for Translation and Intercultural Studies (IATIS), have stepped up to address these needs (Bancroft, 2011:13–18). (See Chapters 2 and 3 for a discussion of key internal and external players.)

A motivating factor behind the development of language access laws is risk. A growing body of research documents the dangers of “doing without” qualified community interpreters (e.g., Flores, 2012; Karliner et al., 2007; Green et al., 2005; Ho, 2008) and their impact on the safety and well-being of migrant, indigenous and deaf residents. The fiscal costs are also high due to the medical or legal consequences of errors (see e.g., Quan and Lynch, 2010). As a result there is an increasing concern that quality services cannot be provided effectively or safely across languages without professional interpreters.
The U.S. has seen a rising number of medical malpractice lawsuits and settlements due to inadequate interpreting which range from thousands to millions of dollars (Quan and Lynch, 2010). In the most famous case, one misinterpreted Spanish word, *intoxicado*, resulted in a US$71 million out-of-court settlement. In Miami, Florida, hospital staff who apparently thought they understood Spanish treated the young man after hearing his mother and girlfriend report that he said he felt *intoxicado*. The meaning of *intoxicado* in this case was related to illness caused by food, or food poisoning. However, the hospital medical staff decided this was a case of substance abuse and treated the patient accordingly. In fact, he was experiencing a cerebral haemorrhage. By the time the error was discovered, the incorrect treatment left the patient paralysed from the neck down, for life (Price-Wise, 2014).

A proliferation of stories such as these illustrate the human and fiscal costs of language barriers, whether or not they lead to lawsuits. Such costs have unquestionably been one of the most significant driving forces behind the professionalization of community interpreting.

**Current trends in community interpreting**

**Minimum standards**

A movement towards setting minimum requirements for community interpreters has been spearheaded by governments, court systems, professional associations, advocacy groups, health-care accreditation agencies and coalitions. A growing consensus (see e.g., NCIHC, 2011; IMIA, 2013; ISO, in press) suggests that community interpreters at a minimum should:

- Be at least 18 years old
- Hold a secondary school diploma
- Obtain meaningful results in a validated language proficiency test
- Hold a credential obtained through professional interpreter training or education
- Undergo testing or portfolio review to assure adequate interpreting skills

There is no consensus on whether volunteers, or bilingual employees who interpret as one part of their duties, should interpret at all. However, the fact is that they do, often routinely. In addition, many bilingual employees today have more interpreter training and qualifications than a number of “professional” interpreters.

The fact that standards for court interpreting in many countries, such as the U.S., set a higher bar than for general community interpreting may have contributed to some of the divisions of opinion regarding whether or not legal interpreting is part of community interpreting. There is no simple answer to this question. The first international standard in the field, ISO 13611, excludes legal interpreting from the body of its standard while specifying in its introduction that in many countries legal interpreting is considered part of community interpreting (ISO, in press). Certain countries, such as the U.S., publish differing national ethics and standards of practice for legal vs. medical interpreters and have certification tests of quite different levels of rigour for these specializations (for example, official U.S. pass rates for federal court interpreter certification are 4–5% for Spanish, while pass rates for one national medical interpreter certification, available at [http://www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org/faq](http://www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org/faq) (accessed 16 Oct 2014), are 70% for Russian, Cantonese, Spanish and Korean oral exams, 80% for Mandarin and 65% for Vietnamese). In addition, professional protocols, skill sets and professional cultures often divide court from community interpreting (Framer et al., 2010; Bancroft and Rubio-Fitzpatrick, 2011).
In Canada, national standards for community interpreters specifically include legal interpreters (HIN, 2007), whereas the European Union Legal Interpreters and Translators Associations has taken the position that court interpreting is not part of community interpreting. International discussions and disputes surrounding this question seem unlikely to fade away.

Because of the need to ensure and promote high standards in the field, in some countries the profession is increasingly regulated. For example, in Australia, national certification exists for general (including community) interpreters; and in the U.K., training credentials and a Diploma in Public Service (community) Interpreting are required to be listed in the National Registry for Public Service Interpreters. In the U.S. state of Washington, interpreters for public social and healthcare services must be certified and licensed by the state, and legislation may soon require similar status for medical interpreters in other U.S. states. In most countries, however, the profession is not regulated despite increasing levels of professionalization (Swift, 2012). In still other nations, qualified interpreters have emerged only in certain settings such as hospitals and courts.

Limited credentialing exists, and is most often for court or sign language interpreters. National certification for community interpreters in Canada is currently under development. In the UK, credentialing is based on a national exam for a diploma in public service interpreting (DPSI). In the U.S. there are two national medical interpreter certifications programs (through the National Board of Certification for Medical Interpreters and the Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters) as well as a national certification for sign language interpreters (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf) and some state-based sign language interpreter credentialing programs. The U.S. also has one federal court certification program for Spanish and state court interpreter certification available in 20 languages (National Center for State Courts 2014).

Finally, in some countries, such as Sweden (Niska, 2004) and the U.K. (Cambridge et al., 2012), a national registry exists for the professional interpreters, yet a “shadow” profession of uncredentialed “community” interpreters co-exists alongside the credentialed professionals. In a number of countries such as Australia, Sweden, South Africa and Canada, interpreter associations offer credentials for general, conference, court or sign language interpreting but not community interpreting.

Another point to note is the rampant confusion among community interpreters about certification vs. training credentials. Many community interpreters routinely assume that a “certificate” for training is equivalent to “certification”. However, the community interpreting profession considers that only formal testing programs established by federal or state governments or professional associations and groups provide valid certification. “Certification” provided by language companies, school systems, training programs, municipal governments and other entities is not considered valid.

The role of the community interpreter

What is the role of the community interpreter? As Llewellyn-Jones and Lee (2009) report, if one key issue besides interpreter qualifications has bedevilled this field, it is surely the role of the interpreter.

This controversy goes back to the birth of the profession when, in 1995, the first international conference in the field launched a vigorous debate about whether the community interpreter’s role should just be strictly interpreting or should include an activist/advocacy role (Llewellyn-Jones and Lee, 2009). Not knowing what one may safely do as a community interpreter to address communication barriers, misunderstandings, cultural confusion and discrimination against vulnerable residents has left many interpreters confused, and this confusion affects every aspect of their performance (Buendía, 2010:11).
In daily practice, community interpreters are expected to solve problems, explain concepts, solve cultural misunderstandings, take care of a service user’s needs and advocate. Depending on the country or service, the interpreter may be expected to operate at either end of (or anywhere along) a broad spectrum of behaviours. The two ends of that spectrum are:

- The conduit role, where the interpreter restricts his or her activities to interpreting.
- The mediator role, where the interpreter may assist the service user in almost any way, during or outside the session, and may also explain cultural misunderstandings.

For example:

- Professional interpreters in the U.K., Sweden and Canada are more or less expected to restrict their role to interpreting.
- In several countries like Belgium, healthcare interpreters called intercultural mediators are permitted to “help out” the patient or service user as needed.
- In other nations like the U.S, community interpreters sit in the middle of the spectrum: they may do more than interpret but are taught ethical restrictions on the “helper” role.
- In still other countries, such as Spain, Italy, Germany and Switzerland, the two professions of community interpreting and (inter)cultural mediation exist side by side, with interpreters restricting their work primarily to interpreting while intercultural mediators may both interpret and “help out” the service user.

Although some countries adopt formal guidelines dictating interpreting practice, on the ground, most community interpreters make decisions about their role nearly by instinct, depending on their training, market pressures, emotional expectations brought to bear, the influence of their cultural communities and their personal values. They are also routinely asked to fill in background information and explain cultural issues (Meyer, 1998:2). In fact, almost any serious study that examines community interpreter behaviour reports wide variations in conduct. Unfortunately, such research typically does not control for variables like general education levels; length or quality of interpreter training; prevailing ethics and standards; and other key variables. As a result, the muddy picture that emerges is one of community interpreters who often change the message, give opinions, get into side conversations and violate professional ethics and standards (Merlini, 2009). Nevertheless, we do not know the degree to which training and education influence those behaviours except with regard to accuracy, where training appears to have a positive impact (Flores, 2012).

Those interpreters who stay within the conduit role tend to label themselves “professional interpreters”. Those who formally occupy the helper role may have another name, for example cultural (or intercultural) mediator; patient navigator/patient guide/patient advocate; culture broker; co-participant; communication facilitator; bicultural/bilingual assistant; language broker; or cultural interpreter.

Rudvin (2006) makes the distinction between “language mediators” and “cultural mediators”, which essentially refers to the spectrum of the conduit role (where a language mediator may also seek clarification as needed) to the helper role (where, by navigating the cultural context that leads to communication breakdowns, a cultural mediation may actively support assisting service users to obtain meaningful access to service).

The expectation that community interpreters must solve many non-linguistic problems when they interpret, or even after the interpreted session, often weighs heavily on the interpreter (Hsieh, 2006). Kaufert and Koolage (1984) note that role conflicts among indigenous
interpreters in Canada were rooted in the cross-pressures in their roles as language interpreters, culture brokers and patient advocates. In colonial South Africa “the indigenous population did not expect the interpreters to simply act as language mediators; they were also expected to defend the interest of the community and its members” (Tiayon, 2005:8). As Rudvin (2006:61–62) reports, “A cultural mediator is expected to facilitate the integration of migrants in Italy, facilitate interaction with Italian institutions … and generally provide ‘assistance’ to migrants, functioning as a ‘bridge’ between two communities and individual/institution”.

Refugee and small closely-knit cultural communities may also exert pressures on community interpreters to adopt an active role (Avery, 2001). Service providers exert comparable pressures: one Vienna survey of 600 hospital staff showed that the majority wanted the interpreters to lower register, summarize “as needed”, advise parties of barriers to communication and omit “clearly non-relevant” information (Sauvêtre, 2002). Interpreters themselves are often keen to explain what providers do not – a controversial premise. “For example, in order to be culturally appropriate, she would not say to a West African woman, ‘Stop having babies, take the pill’ (as stated by a social worker or midwife). Instead she would say, ‘The social worker said I should tell you that, given your housing and financial problems, wouldn’t it be a good idea to take the pill?’ She joked that her role is to make the message ‘hearable’” (Sargent and Larchanché, 2009:7–8).

When interpreters become too involved this way, they may abrogate the provider’s role or undermine service user autonomy (Davidson, 2001). Llewellyn-Jones and Lee (2009) report that in the U.K., interpreter trainers are drilled on empowering interlocutors and avoiding “paternalistic” behaviours. Otherwise, interpreters who perform cultural mediation incur specific risks such as errors of judgement, side conversations, abrogation of the provider’s role or allowing the interpreter to exert inappropriate influence over decision-making by participants.

The risks and drawbacks of over-intrusion by community interpreters is leading to a rising awareness of the need to delineate a happy medium between the strict message transfer role and the overly liberal helper role. In Belgium and the Netherlands, two researchers have proposed an “interactive interpreting” model situated somewhere between the conduit and helper ends of the spectrum (Verrept and Bot, 2013), in contrast to a previous intercultural mediation model (Verrept, 2008). Like a similar model in the U.S. (Bancroft and Rubio-Fitzpatrick, 2011), the intent is to encourage the interpreter to intervene when communication barriers arise, not to explain the cultural or other issues but instead to identify them (e.g., “The interpreter senses a communication breakdown about the cultural and legal meaning of ‘wife’”), allowing the service provider and service user to ask about and explain the misunderstanding to each other, thereby minimizing the risks.

One emerging best practice is for community interpreters to become the faithful voice of all participants while effectively – but not intrusively – pointing out communication barriers as they emerge in order to facilitate meaningful dialogue, a position clarified in this testimony from a pioneer: “The position I took 10 years ago … as that cultural brokering was an important part of the role of the interpreter as long as it was done with the agreement and understanding of all parties. The underlying principle is that the interpreter does not speak on behalf of anyone but enables people to speak for themselves … I have never believed that advocacy is the responsibility of the interpreter. The interpreter’s job is to facilitate communication so that the parties can advocate for themselves” (Nathan Garber, in a private communication in 2009; emphasis added).

By using mediation not as a way to give advice or incorrect cultural information but as a means to give participants a full voice, the interpreter can let the participants become fully responsible for their own decisions, relieving the interpreter of this weighty responsibility and liability.
Modes of interpreting

The question of role is not the only controversial aspect of the community interpreter’s performance. Modes are another topic that has generated great interest and disputes.

For decades, community interpreters have been taught to perform in three modes: consecutive mode (see Chapter 6); simultaneous mode (see Chapter 5); and sight translation (see Chapter 9).

Consecutive is widely considered the “default” mode in community interpreting and in question-and-answer interpreting in general. Because consecutive mode involves interpreting when speakers pause, it entails less distracting noise, more opportunities to assess the complexity of the issues being addressed and, in general, greater accuracy. (At least, consecutive mode appears to be more accurate than simultaneous for entry-level community interpreters; the research literature is thus inconclusive about whether this is also the case for more accomplished interpreters.) Using consecutive mode is intended to facilitate clear, meaningful communication.

There are, however, times when simultaneous mode will be necessary, for example:

- When speakers are too excited or overwhelmed to pause
- During emergencies
- If speakers are impaired due to disease, substance abuse or medical conditions
- During speeches, meetings, educational or training programs and small conferences
- In any situation where consecutive mode proves inadequate due to constraints of time

In courtrooms, both simultaneous and consecutive modes are required. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence suggests that simultaneous mode is growing more common in community settings, especially for video interpreting, small conferences and public talks. Sight translation, the oral translation of a text, is also widely needed in community interpreting to convey to service users the meaning of forms, prescriptions, legal documents and many other texts provided as part of a service.

However, though it is not widely accepted, a fourth de facto mode exists called summarization. Summarization is prohibited in most legal interpreting, and community interpreters are taught not to summarize. However, some situations require summarization, including emergencies, situations when several people speak at once or sessions that veer out of control. Examples of the latter include psychotic patients, those high on drugs or the arrest of violent criminals. Summarization, however (and perhaps ironically given its low reputation), is a higher-level skill. As a result, community interpreters need training on how to perform it well, training that they rarely receive, in part because summarization is not accepted as a mode of interpreting.

There is some evidence that the boundaries between strict consecutive and simultaneous modes are starting to blur in some settings, including legal and medical, and even the requirement to use consecutive as a default mode is no longer always standard. The evolution of modes will be a trend to watch for in community interpreting. For the time being, however, community interpreters are widely expected, at a minimum to be able to perform in consecutive, simultaneous and sight translation modes.

Ethics and standards of practice

No discussion of the professionalization of community interpreting could be considered without addressing codes of ethics and standards of practice. Ethics and standards help interpreters to make
critical decisions, such as whether or not to summarize. Ethics and standards documents throughout the world have greatly contributed to the quality and enhanced the reputation of community interpreting (Bancroft, 2005). Furthermore, without such published standards community interpreters often have to make decisions “on the fly”, guided primarily by their intuition and training.

Ethics and standards also add clarity to hotly debated questions, for example, whether community interpreters should “change register” by simplifying the service provider’s message to help service users understand. (See Chapter 20 on ethics.)

Here are examples of standards followed by community interpreters:

- Canada (HIN, 2007) and the UK (CILT, 2006) have national ethics and standards for community/public service interpreting. (The UK standards also address conference interpreting.)
- The Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT, 2012) has published national ethics and standards for general interpreting.
- The U.S., EULITA and some European nations offer national ethics and standards for court interpreting.
- Many countries in North and South America, Europe and elsewhere have national ethics and standards for sign language interpreting (which often involves community interpreting). See www.wasli.org for details.

A review of 145 community, medical or legal interpreting ethics and standards documents in 11 languages from 25 countries around the world (Bancroft, 2005) shows the degree to which there is near-universal consensus on three ethical principles: confidentiality, accuracy and impartiality. There is also a strong international consensus around principles that address professionalism, honesty and ethical behaviour, professional development, and professional solidarity.

Where less consensus will be found among community interpreting ethics and standards are the principles that relate to the interpreter’s role and scope of practice, such as cultural mediation and advocacy.

Training and education for community interpreters is urgently needed to help support prevailing ethics and standards and professionalization of the field in general. However, where such training is available at all, it is uneven at best. For a review of community interpreter training programs, see Ertl and Pöllabauer (2010). There is a dire shortage of relevant training programs in great part because the pay for interpreters is too low to justify spending much time and money on professional development. In addition, training is often costly to implement, hard to find and difficult to make profitable. Even universities must have adequate enrolment to run programs. (See Chapter 25 on pedagogy.)

One of the greatest challenges in the field is the sheer number of languages needed and the pragmatic impossibility of providing language-specific training or education in all needed languages, particularly for languages of limited diffusion (LLDs), leading to the proliferation of non-language-specific programs open to interpreters of any language, which suffer from lack of language-specific practice materials. Different ways of addressing this challenge include:

- Have 2–3 training participants or more per class who share the same language so that skills-based and role play activities can be executed in their working languages.
Community interpreting

- Engage “language coaches” (practising interpreters in each language) to guide and give linguistic feedback to participants during practice sessions.
- Translate role play scripts into a number of languages.
- Set up internships.
- Seek language-specific mentors.

All of these are strategies necessary: the more the better. Until a sufficient number of language-specific programs are available (which appears unlikely), non-language-specific programs that develop workaround strategies like those above will be urgently needed.

Finally, community interpreting is inherently stressful and sometimes quite traumatic. An interpreter might interpret for a rape victim, a torture survivor, a war criminal or a psychotic. This is not easy work. While some might consider it merely stressful, a growing body of research has shown that the impact of interpreting in such cases, particularly in mental health (Gomez, 2012), can cause vicarious trauma in interpreters. It is clear, then, that training in coping with vicarious trauma must be a part of any community interpreting curriculum. (See Chapter 21 on vicarious trauma.)

Recommendations for practice

Best practices

The following recommendations for best practice are based on published standards, research, certification or credentialing requirements, conference proceedings, program evaluations, InterpretAmerica summits (Bancroft, 2011) and anecdotal feedback from the field. They fall into three categories:

- Training and education
- Culture and mediation
- Advocacy for the profession

Training and education

Around the world there appears to be an urgent need to enhance training and education for community interpreters in the following ways:

- Conduct national and international surveys to determine what is being taught and identify critical gaps.
- Establish international standards for a common base curriculum and disseminate them widely to improve quality and consistency of training.
- Look to currently existing standards to develop international ethics and standards.
- In all training programs, short or long, blend an emphasis on skills acquisition (especially message transfer skills) with training on ethics, conduct, protocols and roles.
- Devote a considerable percentage of all programs to language-specific, skills-based practice with language-specific supervision and (where feasible) internships.
- As pay and status improve, increase higher education requirements for interpreters.
- Require language proficiency testing through a validated, recognized test as a pre-requisite for training.
- Develop standardized skills-based exit or credentialing exams.
- Develop an international online training directory of community interpreting programs.
Culture and mediation

The interpreter’s role has become complex and confusing. Because of this complexity, Buendía (2010) suggests that universities should shape norms regarding the interpreter’s role.

Rather than tell the interpreter to “only interpret” or “help the service user out as best you can”, it is important to take steps at an international level to provide clarity for community interpreters (and their trainers and other stakeholders) around several key issues, specifically:

- Make clear that the goal is to facilitate dialogue among key participants to the encounter without engaging in paternalism, explanations, cultural errors, incorrect assumptions, abrogation of the provider’s role or the usurping of the service user’s voice.
- Encourage interpreters to report problems (e.g., of risk to a service user’s safety, well-being, human dignity or service access) to the appropriate supervisors rather than taking on the burden of self-directed advocacy.
- Help interpreters engage in self-examination to identify personal and cultural biases.

The latter point is crucial. Without self-examination, the interpreter will almost certainly engage in acts of unconscious bias that influences the content of his or her daily work (Bahadir 2004).

Some of the most influential standards in the field wisely advise the following:

Unshared cultural assumptions create barriers to understanding or message equivalence. [The interpreter’s] role in such situations is not to ‘give the answer’ but rather to help both provider and patient to investigate the intercultural interface that may be creating the communication problem … Interpreters must keep in mind that no matter how much ‘factual’ information they have about the beliefs, values, norms, and customs of a particular culture, they have no way of knowing where the individual facing them in that specific situation stands along a continuum from close adherence to the norms of a culture to acculturation into a new culture.

(MMLA/IMLA, 1995: 15–16)

Advocacy for the profession

The profession has reached a critical stage where it needs to educate key stakeholders. For example, advocates may wish to:

- Coordinate with other interpreting professions at national and international levels to educate the public about what interpreting is, who should perform it and what qualifications are required to do it well.
- Reach out to media, the public, government agencies, institutions that train interpreters, employers and users of interpreters and other stakeholders to educate them about community interpreting.
- Create national or international consortia to oversee training and education programs, to accredit programs and to establish entry-level qualifications as well as curricular core content requirements.

Future directions

It is impossible to predict what will happen in a field as passionate, volatile and dynamic as community interpreting. This is a profession in fervent evolution, yet a few trends seem clear.
The professionalization of community interpreting is continuing at such a dizzying pace that the development of training, education and credentialing programs for community interpreters will likely continue to expand.

The “technologizing” of both general and community interpreting will advance and not retreat. Training and education programs will need to adapt to this reality and train interpreters how to perform phone and video interpreting and use other interpreting-related technology efficiently, wisely and well. (See Chapter 22 on remote interpreting.)

Despite drawbacks in the field, the expansion of community interpreting is dramatic. It has led to an increase in professional recognition, relevant conferences, standards, accreditation programs, a boost in international stature and high growth in services provided. Such trends appear likely to continue, perhaps at a rapid pace.

Community interpreting is one of the most exciting and dynamic professions in the world. The passion of its practitioners is motivated in part by their concerns for social justice. As globalization expands, the importance of the profession will increase, resulting in higher visibility and recognition that may lead to better pay for community interpreters around the world. Meantime, the mission of the profession will remain a precious gift, giving a voice to those who have a fundamental human right to access public services.

Further reading


A summary of one of the most complex issues in community interpreting, the interpreter’s role: enlightening, informative and a good read.


The first of several key volumes collecting papers from the largest international conference in community interpreting – the triennial Critical Link conference paper series.


The first substantive collection of key research on the profession.


A seminal document in the field of healthcare interpreting: clear, cogent and informative.

References


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HEALTHCARE INTERPRETING

Cynthia E. Roat and Ineke H. M. Crezee

When a patient who does not speak English comes to the hospital, everything is foreign. The sights are foreign, the smells are foreign, the sounds are foreign. Everything is strange and frightening. The only thing that is familiar, the only thing that gives hope, is the voice of the interpreter.

Thomas June, medical interpreter, 1992

Introduction

Every day, in countries across the globe, hundreds of thousands of immigrants, refugees, native peoples and those who are deaf and hard of hearing seek healthcare services from providers who do not speak their languages. How will they communicate, if not through an interpreter? Over the past several decades, a combination of political, social, logistic, and economic pressures have transformed an ad hoc activity performed by family members and friends into a unique sub-field of the interpreting profession, with its own code of ethics, standards of practice, training programs, and (in some countries) certification. This is a field that is rapidly growing, changing, and struggling to define itself in the context of not one, but two complex industries.

This chapter will provide a survey of the field of healthcare interpreting in countries which have become destinations for migrants and/or refugees, using the experience of spoken language healthcare interpreters in the United States to illustrate a pattern of development. It will examine the pressures that have influenced the growth of the field, the work of healthcare interpreters, training and certification, and a number of other critical issues.

The chapter will end with some speculation as to the future direction of language access in healthcare in migrant and refugee destination countries, as well as a short list of recommended readings.

Definition of terms

advocacy

any action taken by an interpreter, usually on behalf of a patient, that goes beyond facilitating understanding of what one person has said to another, with the purpose of supporting good health outcomes
bilingual provider

any staff member who provides his or her professional services in more than one language; most frequently used with reference to providers of clinical care such as physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, midwives, physical therapists, speech pathologists, and other healthcare practitioners

dedicated interpreter

an interpreter whose sole function in a healthcare facility is to provide language services

dual-role interpreter

an interpreter whose primary function in a healthcare facility is something other than interpreting; e.g. a medical assistant who also interprets

healthcare interpreting, medical interpreting

interpreting that takes place during interactions related to health care. “Medical Interpreting” was a descriptor used more in the early years of the field; “healthcare interpreting” is a later term recognizing that the field covers interactions that are not strictly medical in nature, such as rehabilitation and mental health. In practice, the terms are used interchangeably and may, in the case of organizational names, simply reflect whichever term created a better acronym.

language access

any initiative to facilitate the availability of products or services across a linguistic barrier. Language access programs in health care include interpreting, translation, provision of bilingual staff, multilingual signage, multilingual communication aids, and many other resources to help healthcare personnel and patients with limited proficiency in the language of service communicate with each other.

language of lesser/limited diffusion (LLD)

in any given geographic region, a language that is spoken by a relatively small number of people. Turkish, for example, is a language of lesser diffusion in the United States, where few Turkish speakers have immigrated, but not in Germany, where there is a large Turkish community. Somali is a language of lesser diffusion in Atlanta, but not in Minneapolis. The application of this designation to a language does not in any way reflect its importance on the world stage, the number of people in the world who speak it, or its importance to those for whom it is their mother tongue.

language service provider

a company (for-profit or non-profit) that provides interpretation and/or translation services

limited-English-proficient (LEP) (as defined by the U.S. Census)

speaking English “less than very well,” a self-identifier appearing on the U.S. census form

profession

“A special type of occupation [possessing] corporate solidarity, prolonged specialized training in a body of abstract knowledge, and a collectivity or service orientation … a vocational sub-culture which comprises implicit codes of behavior, and generates an esprit de corps among members of the same profession, and ensures them certain occupational
advantages … bureaucratic structures and monopolistic privileges to perform certain types of work” (Jackson, 2010).

**staff interpreter**

- dedicated interpreter who is an employee of a company, facility or program

**video interpreting, video remote interpreting (VRI)**

- interpreting that takes place through a video-conference connection; video medical interpreting (VMI) refers specifically to video interpreting used to support healthcare encounters

**From ad hoc activity to standard of care**

Healthcare interpreting has been developing slowly over the past half-century, with many ups and downs, in numerous countries around the world. In Australia, for example, a nationwide telephone interpreting service (TIS) was introduced by the Department of Immigration as early as 1973, providing telephone interpreting services in 160 languages around Australia by 2010 (Phillips, 2010). Some Canadian and American hospitals began to provide interpreting services in the 1980s, and services expanded continuously over the subsequent decades. In New Zealand, the first health interpreting service was established in 1991, following a series of medical misadventures (Crezee, 2009b, 2013), with health interpreting services being available across the country by 2014.

Advances, however, have not been necessarily constant. In European countries, excellent intercultural healthcare policies, including the provision of interpreters, were introduced in some countries in the 1990s, but some have been reversed with changes in government (Mladovsky, Rechel, Ingleby and McKee, 2012). Other countries, including Spain (C. Valero-Garcés, 2014, personal communication) and Japan (T. Asano, 2012, personal communication) are still struggling in the early phases of introducing systematic language services in healthcare, while in the United Kingdom, the National Health Service reportedly still routinely asks patients to bring their own interpreter (Y. Fowler, 2014, personal communication).

A closer look at how the field has developed in one county will help to illustrate the kind of comprehensive efforts necessary to make a healthcare system change the way it manages care across language and culture, and explain why providing systemic and systematic language access in health care is so difficult. This section will outline some of the key steps by which healthcare interpreting in the United States transitioned over the past 30 years from an *ad hoc* activity to a civil rights issue to an industry standard in that country.

**A timeline**

Prior to the 1970s, healthcare interpreting in the U.S., as in other developed countries such as Sweden, Italy (Merlini, 2009), The Netherlands (de Boe, in press) and Australia (Pöchhacker, 2004; Pöchhacker and Shlesinger, 2007), was an *ad hoc* service, provided informally by family members (including children), friends, and untrained/untested bilingual staff. The assumption was that if one could speak two languages, one could interpret between them, and that the responsibility for providing an interpreter lay with the patient. Little attention was paid to this issue, and providers were expected to “get by” as best they could.

Then the Vietnam War, ending in 1975, brought an influx of Southeast Asian refugees into the United States. Healthcare institutions whose LEP patient populations had been principally
Latino/Hispanic, and whose providers had made do with high school Spanish, now found themselves serving patients who spoke Cambodian, Lao, Hmong, Vietnamese and other languages for which they were completely unprepared. Community clinics sprang up in some parts of the country to serve these populations, depending heavily on the untutored interpreting of rapidly-trained foreign-born medical assistants. When patients were referred for specialty care, no interpretation was available. Overall, language represented a huge barrier to accessing quality health care for refugee and immigrant communities.

In 1974, however, a legal decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, based on civil rights legislation from a decade earlier, laid the legal groundwork for the establishment of a language access movement. Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act states that:

No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.

In Lau vs. Nichols, families of Chinese-American students in San Francisco argued that the public schools’ unwillingness to provide language assistance excluded their LEP children from participating in publically funded education, thereby violating the Title VI prohibition against discrimination based on national origin. The Supreme Court agreed, affirming that language is an inextricable aspect of country of national origin and therefore protected under Title VI. This decision was significant, as virtually every medical center in the U.S. accepts some form of federal funding. This interpretation of Title VI came to form the basis for legal actions over the next three decades that, little by little, propelled healthcare toward the development of interpreter service programs.

The impact of Lau vs. Nichols, however, was hardly instantaneous. By 1980, formal healthcare interpreter services could be found in only a few cities in the U.S. In most places, healthcare institutions remained ignorant of their responsibilities under Title VI, continuing to use family and friends as interpreters. The following decade did see some significant advances. A growing number of formal complaints filed with the Office for Civil Rights resulted in investigations and subsequent settlements across the country. A few programs, most very short, to train interpreters specifically for health care began to be offered in a handful of cities. In 1986, the first professional association specifically for healthcare interpreters, the Massachusetts Medical Interpreter Association (MMIA), was founded. In 1989, Region X of the Office for Civil Rights issued guidance to recipients of federal funding, educating them on their responsibility to provide language access.

In the 1990s, the field began to gain momentum. In 1991, Washington State became the first state to use public money to pay for interpreter services for patients on Medicaid (healthcare coverage for low income persons in the U.S.). In 1994, Bridging the Gap, a 40-hour training for healthcare interpreters was launched. Due to a training-of-trainers program and free licensing, the course was rapidly disseminated throughout the country. In that same year, the Cross Cultural Health Care Program in Seattle convened the first meeting of the National Working Group that, five years later, was to become the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care. The MMIA published the first Medical Interpreting Standards of Practice in 1996, and interpreter associations focused specifically on healthcare began to form in various parts of the U.S., such as Seattle, Atlanta, and the Upper Midwest. In June of 1995, the first international conference on community interpreting – Critical Link – was held in Ontario, Canada, and the following year, the MMIA organized the first U.S. conference on medical interpreting. Research into interpreter use increased, and technology began to play an incipient role in the field. Telephone interpreting began to gain some adherents, and in 1995, the language services company that would
later become known as CyraCom patented the first dual-handset phone adapted for telephone interpreting. It was not really until the first years of the new millennium, however, that healthcare interpreting took off, due to a series of critical pressures all coalescing:

- **Awareness of demographic trends:** In 2000, the U.S. Census published data showing that limited English proficiency had increased in the population from 6.1% to 8.1% over the previous decade. The report indicated that over 22 million people in the U.S. needed interpreter services (U.S. Census, 2000) and that the greatest increases had come in states that were traditionally home to homogeneous English-speaking populations. Even those who worked in the field had not realized how widespread and acute the need for interpreters had become.

- **Legal pressure:** In 2002, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office for Civil Rights (OCR) published the final version of national guidance to organizations receiving federal funds regarding Title VI prohibition against national origin discrimination affecting LEP persons. The message was clear: virtually every hospital in the country needed to provide interpreters, and OCR would be investigating those that failed to do so.

- **Attention from accrediting agencies:** In 2007, The Joint Commission, a non-profit organization that accredits hospitals in the U.S., published “Hospitals, Language and Culture: A Snapshot of the Nation,” an in-depth study of language access in 60 U.S. hospitals. This report led to the clear inclusion of language rights in The Joint Commission’s accreditation standards. As the vast majority of American hospitals were (and still are) accredited by The Joint Commission, the inclusion of these requirements in their standards called the attention of senior hospital leadership to the necessity of implementing quality language services in a way that previous advocacy effort had not.

- **Increased standardization within the healthcare interpreting field:** After years of national consensus-building, the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care published the National Code of Ethics for Interpreters in Health Care in 2004, National Standards of Practice for Interpreters in Health Care in 2005 and National Standards for Healthcare Interpreter Training Programs in 2011. In late 2009, the National Board of Certification of Medical Interpreters launched the first national certification for Spanish medical interpreters, followed about a year later by the Certification Commission of Healthcare Interpreters’ credentialing program for all interpreters.

During this decade, the federal Office of Minority Health and a number of major charitable foundations invested millions of dollars in research, organizational efforts, pilot programs, and the development of standards in the area of language access. Training programs for healthcare interpreters multiplied, with on-line versions appearing in the early 2010s. By mid-decade, half of the states in the country had interpreter associations focusing on healthcare interpreters. Research increased both in quantity and quality, making it possible to argue compellingly that qualified interpreters could impact both the quality and cost of health care (Flores, 2005). Telephonic interpreting became ubiquitous and hospitals started experimenting with video interpreting as well. Improved technology also facilitated interpreter scheduling and other logistic advances.

Most importantly, this decade witnessed a sea-change in the way healthcare administrators looked at this issue of language. Perhaps due to the work of the OCR, or the attention that industry associations were paying to the issue, senior administrators stopped asking, “Why do we have to provide interpreters?” and started asking, “How can we provide language services in the most
cost-effective way?” Interpreting would no longer be relegated to family and friends; it was now accepted that making their services linguistically accessible was the responsibility of healthcare providers. Healthcare interpreting was emerging as a profession in its own right, with the modes of delivery and the marketplace evolving at a dizzying pace.

The argument

What, then, are the compelling arguments in 2014 for the adequate provision of language access services in health care? Overall, they can be grouped into four general areas: social justice, legal requirements, quality of care/patient safety, and cost.

Social justice arguments

The social justice arguments for language services focus on fairness. Whether using the language of “human rights” as in Europe or that of “equal access” as in the U.S., supporters argue that patients who do not speak the dominant language of the country in which they live cannot access health care as easily as the dominant population can, even though they help pay for the health system through their taxes. This applies to immigrant and refugee populations, as well as to indigenous/aboriginal populations who are linguistic minorities. Research in the U.S. and the U.K. has shown that LEP families indeed have significantly greater difficulty in accessing care than English-speaking families in the same socioeconomic strata (Jacobs et al., 2001; Smedley et al., 2003; Flores 2005; Bischoff, 2012). Mladovsky et al. (2012) describe “evidence from across the EU (that) demonstrates considerable, but varied, inequalities between migrants and non-migrants in health and access to health services.” In Australia and New Zealand, on the other hand, access to health care is seen as a universal right which extends to access to healthcare interpreters (Phillips, 2010).

There are also strong public health reasons as to why all individuals should have access to health care. Infectious disease does not recognize language or social class. In an era in which antibiotic-resistant staff infections (MRSA), bird flu, antibiotic-resistant tuberculosis, measles, and other infectious diseases have started to appear or reappear, systematically limiting any specific populations’ access to health care by limiting their access to interpreters puts the entire population at risk.

Legal and regulatory arguments

As discussed above, it was not concern over social justice but legal requirements that first pushed the healthcare sector in the U.S. to begin providing language services in a coherent way, though it should be noted that many of the legal requirements were born out of the social justice movement. Such has been the case in many countries, including Australia, New Zealand, and some European countries (Cattacin et al., 2006; Crezee, 2009a; Phillips, 2010; Verrept, 2012; Bot and Verrept, 2013).

In the U.S., critical statutes and regulations driving language access include Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, discussed earlier; The Americans with Disabilities Act, which requires that institutions make “reasonable accommodation” to support access to their services by individuals with disabilities, including hearing impairment; state and local laws requiring the provision of interpreters under specific circumstances; Medicaid Managed Care contracts, which require managed care organizations providing care with federal funding to provide interpreters for LEP patients; and the standards of accreditation organizations such as The Joint Commission.
Quality of care and patient safety arguments

To healthcare providers such as doctors and nurses, the most compelling argument for language services is that they cannot provide quality care if they cannot communicate clearly with patients and families. Building rapport, elicit a health history, understand symptoms, obtain informed consent for tests, share a potential diagnosis, explain treatment options, negotiate a treatment protocol, teach about a condition or how to use medical equipment, and do follow-up—all require clear communication. As a matter of fact, doctors report that the most common (and cheapest) diagnostic test they do is the medical interview. So, if communication is impeded by language barriers, quality of care is clearly impacted (Flores, 2005; Smedley et al., 2003; Mladovsky et al., 2012).

As a corollary, lack of clear communication compromises patient safety. Recent research from The Joint Commission has shown that Limited English Proficient (LEP) patients are more likely to have serious incidents based on communication failure while hospitalized, and that those incidents are more likely to lead to serious outcomes than communication failures with English-speaking patients (Divi et al., 2007).

Communication lies at the heart of healthcare. Without it, providers cannot provide good care, and patients are at risk. It is surprising, in fact, that clinicians are not more worried than they are about the quality of the interpreting on which they depend.

Financial arguments

Language services cost money. A large urban medical center in the U.S. can easily spend $2–3 million/year on interpreting, which usually comes out of a hospital’s general operating budget. In an economic climate of cutbacks and budget tightening, common everywhere around the world today, how can hospitals be expected to make this kind of investment?

In fact, the use of qualified interpreters, while not lowering the cost of care, will certainly help a hospital avoid costs it would have otherwise incurred in caring for LEP patients; this is called “cost containment.” For example, a 2002 study from Boston showed that LEP patients who received interpreter services in the emergency room (ER) had lower overall cost of care over the next three months (including the ER visit and the interpreter) than LEP patients who did not get an interpreter (Bernstein, et al., 2002). Their overall cost of care was even lower than that of English-speaking patients seen in the ER at the same time for the same diagnosis. Other research has shown that the use of qualified interpreters lowers admission and readmission rates, shortens hospital stays, decreases referrals for unnecessary diagnostic tests, and increases clinic through-put, all of which have implications for the cost of care (Flores, 2005).

The bottom line is that it is cheaper to care for patients who do not speak the dominant language using qualified interpreters than it is to do so without qualified interpreters. To hospital administrators facing serious financial constraints, this may be one of the most compelling arguments for language services.

Other “levers” for making change

The arguments made above have been effective over time in the United States in convincing healthcare institutions to implement language access programs, largely because they take advantage of the motivations specific to the American social, economic, legal, and political system. Other countries will have different systems with a different mix of motivators, and so advocates there may use different arguments to plead the case of language access. For example, there has been
interest in Japan in boosting medical tourism, leading the Ministry of Tourism to look into encouraging the use of medical interpreters as a means of attracting foreign patients (M. Ishizaki, 2012, personal communication). Yuko Nishimura, a professor of social anthropology at Komazawa University in Tokyo, has suggested that, as Japan is a country with a low birth rate that finds itself with a dwindling work force, large manufacturers may support language programs in health care in order to provide services to a growing immigrant labor force (Nishimura, 2005). In parts of Europe, on the other hand, where human rights are a strong value, language access is presented more as a human rights issue (Fernandes and Pereira Miguel, 2009; Chimienti, 2009).

Regardless of the specific arguments used to support the provision of interpreter services, the fact remains that a lack of qualified interpreters leads to poor health outcomes for patients who do not speak the majority language.

Healthcare interpreting today

Healthcare interpreting as a field is evolving so quickly that anything written here about current practices today may actually be out of date by the time this book goes to press. There are also tremendous variations depending on language pair, geographic location, and modality of service delivery. That said, following is a description of what a prospective interpreter might expect regarding work in this field. While all interpreting work shares some commonalities, there are certain aspects of interpreting in health care that set it apart.

Is healthcare interpreting different from interpreting in other settings?

One might argue that, give or take some specialized vocabulary, the work of interpreting is the same regardless of venue. After all, whether in the hospital, the courtroom, or the lecture hall, all interpreters work to convey in one language the oral or visual messages uttered in a different language.

Venue does make a difference, however. Venue will determine to a large degree the purpose of the communication, the context of the communication, and the consequences of miscommunication. For example, consider an adversarial legal proceeding. Lawyers may want everyone to understand what they say, but sometimes they are trying to create an impression instead, and other times they are trying to create confusion for a particular purpose. While the consequences of miscommunication can be quite serious, the responsibility for successful communication lies with the lawyers, who are considered the advocates for the parties they represent (see Chapter 12 on court interpreting).

Compare this to a healthcare encounter. In healthcare, the interactions are collaborative, meaning that all the participants generally want the same outcome; they want the patient to get well and stay well. Everyone involved wants to understand and to be understood, because the consequences of miscommunication can be quite serious – even fatal. The levels of power and preparation of the participants are quite different, with providers holding most of each, leaving patients often feeling quite disempowered. For this reason – because the requirements of the communicative interactions are different – healthcare interpreters often take a broader role than interpreters in legal settings.

The day-to-day work of healthcare interpreters

Interpreters can be found in every healthcare setting imaginable: hospitals, clinics, skilled nursing centers, mental health centers, public health departments, home health visits, inpatient and
out-patient settings, emergency rooms, primary care, specialty care, pharmacy, rehabilitation centers, school-based clinics, rural and urban settings, even prisons. They may provide their services in person, over a telephone, or through a video-conference connection, working from home, from an office or from a call center. Healthcare interpreters may be full-time staff or they may work as freelancers.

**Staff interpreters**

Most large urban medical centers in the U.S. today have at least some staff interpreters working in the languages of highest demand, and this is probably true of major cities all over the developed world. Harborview Medical Center in Seattle, for example, has had as many as 70 full- and part-time interpreters on staff at a given time. Staff interpreters usually work a set schedule, but they may be expected to take varying shifts to assure full coverage. They interpret for pre-scheduled appointments as well as for the unscheduled patients being seen in the emergency room and urgent care departments. Staff interpreters most often interpret in person, but more and more medical centers are also using them to interpret over the phone and through videoconferencing connections, so as to maximize flexibility, effectiveness and efficiency.

Working as a staff interpreter has a number of benefits for those who love being of service: the security of a full-time job, predictability of assignments, being perceived as an integral part of the healthcare team, being warmly welcomed by providers and patients alike, and having the support of interpreter colleagues. On the down side, staff interpreters in healthcare often have stressful work schedules and are intimately involved with some of the most intensive human experiences imaginable. Because they cannot routinely turn down assignments, they may find themselves working closely and repeatedly with unpleasant patients and providers, and in uncomfortable situations. Working as a staff interpreter can be highly rewarding, but it is not for the faint of heart.

**Dual-role interpreters**

Many healthcare facilities, especially those in areas with one or two dominant immigrant or refugee language groups, will train their bilingual staff to also function as so-called dual-role interpreters. They are hired initially for other healthcare roles – nurse, laboratory technicians, etc. – and interpret as a secondary job.

Like staff interpreters, dual-role interpreters enjoy the benefits of full-time employment. Unlike staff interpreters, most dual-role interpreters only interpret in their own work area in the facility, so they do not need the same wide range of vocabulary that a staff interpreter, who serves all the facilities’ providers, must know.

Dual-role interpreters face their own challenges, though. As they do not interpret all the time, their skills can easily atrophy. They also may not think of themselves as interpreters, passing up opportunities for training and continuing education.

**Freelance interpreters**

Many interpreters choose to work as freelancers, also called “contract interpreters:” independent business people who interpret in a variety of healthcare, legal, social service, and educational settings, who may work in person or remotely, and who may mix interpreting with translation. Freelancers enjoy tremendous freedom and flexibility in choosing the work they want to do and the clients for whom they want to do it. They can also experience wide variety in their assignments.
At the same time, maintaining a small business requires excellent organizational skills as well as a fair amount of time to secure jobs, invoice for payment and address the legal requirements of having a small business.

Remote interpreters

Some interpreters work as employees or contractors for language service providers that specialize in telephonic or video interpreting (Phillips, 2010). These interpreters may work in a call center, where they take incoming calls from many healthcare facilities and, indeed, from non-healthcare settings as well. They also may work from home. Until recently, this was true only for telephonic interpreters, but advances in internet and encryption technologies are making it possible for freelance interpreters to provide video interpreting from their home offices as well, creating greater flexibility for the entire industry (see Chapter 22 on remote interpreting).

Qualifications to work in the field

Because healthcare interpreting is developing unevenly across the country and the world, the qualifications required for employment in the field depend entirely on the location, the languages spoken, and work preferences. In a common language pair like English-Spanish, in a city with sophisticated language access programs, prospective interpreters need better credentials than in a less-developed area, working in a language of lesser diffusion. So instead of addressing the qualifications needed to obtain employment, this section will address instead the qualifications necessary to do this work well.

Life skills

Interpreting is a service profession. Healthcare interpreters work regularly with patients and families at their worst: sick, anxious, confused, sometimes even angry, desperate, despairing. They work with providers who are rushed, often frustrated, and frequently unskilled in working cross-culturally. So, here are some characteristics skilled healthcare interpreter should have:

- An enjoyment of people and a desire to be of service to them.
- Excellent communication skills.
- Patience and ability to stay calm under pressure.
- Compassion, but also clear personal boundaries.
- Comfort with the highly intimate content of healthcare discussions.
- Self-awareness and a commitment to emotional self-care.

Someone who intends to work as an on-site interpreter will also need to be comfortable with the sights, sounds, and smells of the healthcare environment.

Language skills

All interpreters must have excellent language skills. The National Standards for Healthcare Interpreter Training Programs in the United States recommend fluency at a professional proficiency level according to the scales developed by national language testing bodies (NCIHC, 2011). Of course, interpreters never stop honing their linguistic skills in all their working languages; this is a life-long endeavor.
In addition to being generally fluent in at least two languages, healthcare interpreters must also dominate a wide range of healthcare-related vocabulary in both their languages. This can be a challenge, as there is often a signal lack of linguistic equivalence between the language of healthcare and that of many immigrant, refugee, or indigenous/aboriginal patients. Folk terminology and culture-specific issues relating to different patient attitudes towards health and illness, the “discussibility” of certain topics, and expectations towards managing chronic conditions rather than “curing” them may also be a challenge (Crezee, 2013). It may be necessary to create word pictures where no single term exists, or to engage in paraphrasing. In addition, bilingual medical glossaries do not exist in many language pairs, making the development and maintenance of a bilingual medical vocabulary even more difficult.

Training

Regardless of whether it is required for employment, basic training as an interpreter is absolutely critical in order to provide professional services. While some people are naturally adept at the linguistic conversion required for interpretation, the ethics and protocols that make a good interpreter must be learned. In the United States, 40 hours of basic training is commonly viewed as the absolute minimum, to be followed by significant continuing education. Many employers expect to see much more: between 60 and 120 hours, with an additional practicum. The number of college-level programs in healthcare interpreting is growing, as is the availability of on-line training. The International Medical Interpreter Association maintains a list of some of these programs on its website at www.imiaweb.org – accessed 16 Oct 2014 – (see also Chapter 25 on pedagogy).

Certification

Certification specifically for healthcare interpreters is available in very few countries. Australia has had a national accreditation system for interpreters for decades (Tebble, 1998; Hale, 2012), but the “professional” level tests are not specific to healthcare interpreting (Hale, 2012). A similar system for the accreditation of general interpreters (and translators) has existed in the past in The Netherlands. New Zealand, although a small country, has offered language-neutral healthcare interpreter training programs at tertiary level since 1991 (Crezee, 2009b), but there is no certification test per se.

In the United States, on the other hand, circumstances have led to the concurrent development of two national certification tests for healthcare interpreters: the Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters (http://www.healthcareinterpretercertification.org/ – accessed 16 Oct 2014) and the National Board of Certification of Medical Interpreters (http://www.certifiedmedicalinterpreters.org/ – accessed 16 Oct 2014). While relatively few employers currently require any kind of national credential for healthcare interpreters, being certified is certainly one way for interpreters to differentiate themselves from other candidates for interpreting jobs.

Critical issues in healthcare interpreting

Role boundaries of the healthcare interpreter

Without doubt, the most persistent and difficult debate in healthcare interpreting has been and continues to be the scope of the interpreter’s role. The National Council on Interpreting in Health Care spent years deconstructing this issue, and even today it is the basis of most of the ethical and logistical dilemmas facing interpreters in this venue. Different countries have adopted
different models, from the relatively more restrictive role definitions in Canada (HIN, 2007) and Australia (NAATI, 2014; AUSIT, 2014) to the more comprehensive model in Belgium (Verrept, 2012). The U.S. lies somewhere in the middle.

The crux of the question is this: are healthcare interpreters primarily healthcare workers whose specialty is language, or are they language professionals who work in healthcare? The truth is, they are both, in a way that is unique to this field. The issue is examined more closely below:

The quintessential vision of the interpreter is the objective “black box:” a message in one language goes in and the equivalent message in another language comes out (Bot, 2013). Of course, this is a gross oversimplification of how language and communication work. A message is understood only within the context of culture, prior knowledge, and shared meaning. So, to what degree are interpreters responsible for simply reproducing the message? To what degree are they responsible for assuring understanding? To what degree are they responsible for the outcome of the healthcare encounter? Consider the following statement from a cardiologist:

We’ve gotten the results from the MRI and several of your coronary arteries appear to be partially occluded. I think our next step would be angioplasty to see if we can open those up without having to do a full-fledged by-pass.

Even conscientious interpreters might disagree how to render this speech. One might argue that it is best to just interpret what was said, maintaining the register and using equivalent acronyms if they exist, letting the patient ask if he does not understand. Unfortunately, whether because of cultural norms or a sense of disempowerment linked to immigrant/refugee background and low socioeconomic status, many patients who need interpreters are unlikely to admit that they do not understand. Some will argue that assuring understanding is the physician’s responsibility, not the interpreter’s, while others feel that the consequences of the patient not understanding are so high that everyone should take responsibility.

In trying to ensure understanding, though, some interpreters can go too far. If interpreters explain the message, lower the register, take out the acronyms, and check for understanding, they run the risk of explaining concepts incorrectly. In addition, assuming that the patient needs the interpreter to lower the register can be patronizing; some patients will understand the higher register just fine. More interventionist interpreters may point out that they do not try to explain concepts that they do not understand, and that, after years of experience, these are few and far between. They may argue that they can identify a patient’s level of education by his use of oral language, and that careful observation of body language will reveal if the patient does or does not understand. But can an interpreter do that over the telephone? And, if the interpreter lowers the register the doctor will never know that the register was too high to begin with. On the other hand, when a doctor is a poor communicator, will he or she pick up on cross-cultural cues that the register is too high?

And so the discussion goes on.

The truth is, both sides of the argument are largely correct. As healthcare workers, interpreters have a moral imperative to help the patient understand; clear communication and understanding between patients and providers is at the absolute heart of good healthcare. Biomedicine is complex and sees the patient as an educated partner in decision-making, but patient health literacy is often low, and healthcare systems do not do a good job of bridging the gap. In addition, the systems for accessing care are complicated and confusing. Combine these challenges with anti-immigrant sentiment and outright racism, and many limited proficient patients do not receive the care they need or to which they are entitled. Interpreters, as the linguistic and cultural link between patients and the healthcare system, can make the difference.
However, as many interpreters enter the healthcare interpreting field because they are natural helpers, they are at high risk for overstepping, taking over the encounter, explaining incorrectly, patronizing patients who do understand, and, in the end, compromising the good health care they meant to facilitate. Where is the balance between converting language with no concern for understanding, and going beyond appropriate role boundaries?

In the mid-1990s, the Cross Cultural Health Care Program in Seattle, WA, published a basic training for healthcare interpreters that introduced a model for understanding the interpreter’s role, called “incremental intervention” (Cross Cultural Health Care Program, 1999). This model sought to create some boundaries around the interpreter’s role while at the same time allowing sufficient flexibility for the interpreter to meet the communicative needs of patients and providers in diverse types of encounters. This model posited that the interpreter’s purpose in the healthcare encounter was to “facilitate understanding in communication between people speaking different languages.” Anything beyond facilitating communication was not part of the interpreter’s role. Within this purpose, interpreters might have to move between the roles of Conduit, Clarifier, Culture Broker, and occasionally Advocate in order to overcome barriers to understanding. Conduit – the accurate rendering of meaning, maintaining tone and register – was considered the default role, in which interpreters began and which interpreters left temporarily only when misunderstanding was occurring. For example, if inappropriate register was leading to misunderstanding, the interpreter would temporarily become a “clarifier,” lowering the register and checking for understanding, then go back to conduit interpreting. If a cultural difference was leading to misunderstanding of what was said, the interpreter would act as a culture broker to point out the misunderstanding, then immediately go back to being a conduit. Within this framework, interpreters were to choose always the least invasive role that would lead to clear communication, allowing them to tailor their practice to the needs of the specific individuals for whom they are interpreting.

Incremental intervention provided the field with a framework to more specifically discuss the interpreter’s role, and while the first three roles became widely accepted, the final role of advocate continued for years to be a stumbling block for many. Interpreters trained for other settings felt this role violated the interpreter’s “neutrality,” while language company owners worried about liability if interpreters got involved in contentious situations with company clients. Professionals rooted in healthcare disciplines argued that ALL healthcare workers, including doctors and nurses, are called upon to advocate for patients on occasion. And interpreters coming from a social justice viewpoint saw advocacy in the face of ill treatment as a human responsibility.

Finally, in 2004, the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care (NCIHC) published the National Code of Ethics for Interpreters in Health Care. In response to demands from the field for some concrete guidance regarding advocacy, the NCIHC added a canon to the code stating that:

> when a patient’s health, well-being, or dignity is at risk, the interpreter may be justified in acting as an advocate. Advocacy is understood as an action taken on behalf of an individual that goes beyond facilitating communication, with the intention of supporting good health outcomes. Advocacy must only be undertaken after careful and thoughtful analysis of the situation and if other less intrusive actions have not resolved the problem.

(NCIHC, 2004)

Even this carefully considered statement has not laid to rest the debate on the interpreter’s role in health care. Within the intimate conversations between patient and provider, the interpreter still
walks a razor’s edge between intervening too little and intervening too much. Today, however, this discussion has moved outside of healthcare interpreting to involve legal interpreting and sign interpreting, and the choice is now being posed as between interpreting as a technical profession or interpreting as a practice profession (see Chapter 20 on ethics).

Future directions

What can we expect in the healthcare interpreting world of the future? As mentioned before, the field is growing and changing at such a pace that it is difficult to predict, but here are some likely directions:

- The need for healthcare interpreters will continue to grow. A quick look at demographics and patterns of immigration in much of the developed world should convince us that the need for interpreters in all public sectors will only continue to grow in the near future. In countries where birth rates are below replacement level, the lack of a viable workforce will build economic pressure for increased immigration. These immigrant populations will need health care, and the ever growing body of evidence showing the positive impact of language services not only on quality of care but on cost containment must lead to increased language access in countries with significant immigrant populations.

- Training and certification will become more widely required. As the availability of training programs increases, as more interpreters become certified, and as the expectations of healthcare providers for quality interpreting grow, it is likely that more employers will require basic training and credentialing of interpreters, both to assure quality services and to protect themselves against legal liability.

- Remote interpreting will expand, at least in technologically advanced countries. The growth of remote interpreting – especially video interpreting – is the one certainty in this field. While on-site interpreters can arguably provide a wider range of services to patients and families, hospitals will not be able to meet the growing demand for language services with on-site interpretation alone. A freelance on-site interpreter, running between hospitals and clinics, might be able to complete three or four interpretations in a day, while an in-house on-site interpreter might accompany eight or nine patients in an eight-hour shift. A remote interpreter, however, can attend to triple that number, because she does not have to travel between appointments, find parking, or wait for a provider who is running behind. Remote interpreters are available in an average of 15–30 seconds, whenever the providers need them, in a wider range of languages than on-site interpreters. As language access programs become more sophisticated, they are getting better at using telephonic interpreting for shorter, more routine interactions and video interpreting for longer, straightforward interactions, while saving their staff interpreters for the emotionally difficult encounters. So, while there is no doubt that providers and patients prefer an on-site interpreter, and while there is growing evidence that video and telephone interpreters may feel more isolated than on-site interpreters (Wilson, 2013), remote interpreting is definitely here to stay.

Why will video interpreting expand in particular? Research has shown that, if patients and providers cannot have an on-site interpreter, they prefer video to telephonic interpreting (Locatis et al., 2010). Interpreters also feel that in encounters with significant educational or psychosocial content, they were able to do better with video interpreting (Price et al., 2012). But most importantly, healthcare facilities are busily installing the wireless internet systems on which video interpreting depends, not for the sake of language access but for application with electronic medical records. These improvements in internet access, together with the
decreasing cost of tablet computers, the growing number of language service providers offering video interpreting, and the ability to connect with freelance remote interpreters at home through highly encrypted connections, will push the growth of this service over the coming years (see Chapter 22 on remote interpreting).

- Healthcare interpreting will become more specialized, and additional career paths will develop. Until very recently, the focus of the healthcare interpreting world has been on developing systems to identify and deliver an interpreter – any interpreter – into a healthcare encounter and on improving the basic skills of healthcare interpreters in general (e.g. Crezee, 2013). However, as more employers are requiring basic training and eventually credentialing, and as remote interpreting makes it possible to pull from a national or international labor force instead of a local one, there will likely be a growing focus on specialization within the field.

  Why is this needed? Healthcare includes a broad set of services, with extensive specialized vocabulary, goals and techniques. The purpose of a primary care doctor’s interview and that of a mental health practitioner are often not the same. The best techniques for interpreting for children are different than those used with adults. Interpreting well in a trauma bay, or on a call to an emergency switchboard, or at the end of life requires an understanding of the particular purpose of communication in that setting, the processes, the roles of participants and the needs of the speakers, all of which differ. A general healthcare interpreter can interpret in these specialized encounters, but as the choice of interpreters increases, preference will be given to interpreters who know these fields best.

  So, the future may demand interpreters who not only specialize in healthcare interpreting, but specialize further in mental health interpreting, interpreting for trauma, pediatric interpreting, etc. Already, specialized training is becoming available for interpreters serving victims of trauma and torture (such as the Healing Voices program; see [http://voice-of-love.org/about](http://voice-of-love.org/about)), and one telephonic interpreting company (Pacific Interpreters, 2014) has provided specialized training in pediatric interpreting for its own interpreters. Training on interpreting in palliative care can be taken on-line or a curriculum can be downloaded for free (Roat et al., 2011) and workshops on mental health interpreting are in high demand.

  It is also likely that additional career paths for healthcare interpreters may develop. At the moment, the only real path for experienced healthcare interpreters who want to advance is to either expand into other areas of interpreting or go into administration of language access programs. However, new roles for healthcare interpreters are developing. For example, there is a new movement in the United States toward training Bilingual Patient Navigators to help people learn to interact effectively with the complex healthcare system in the U.S. These individuals, who often serve medically complex patients and families with long-term health problems, are not only interpreters but also teachers who patiently instruct and model for patients how to make and change appointments, how to ask questions of providers, and how to effectively advocate for themselves within a system. They also teach providers how to identify and negotiate cultural barriers to care. This hybrid role is just one of many that are emerging in which interpreting is a part, but not all, of the skills required.

- Interpreters may be required to become translators as well.

  There is a large push almost everywhere to contain the ever-rising costs of health care. One mechanism for doing this is the use of technology to facilitate communication. In the U.S., as part of the 2010 economic stimulus package, the U.S. government offered a significant financial incentive to hospitals and clinics to implement electronic medical records, which can be easily accessed by all of a patient’s healthcare providers, reducing time delays and medical errors. As part of the implementation of this plan, 2014 will see a parallel push to facilitate more electronic consultation between patients and their doctors, using email, texting and other rapid forms of
written communication. Of course, healthcare facilities will have to make these services equally available to limited-English-proficient patients in order to comply with civil rights legislation. It will no longer be enough to have interpreters available for patient visits. Facilities will require linguists who can rapidly and accurately translate the written message of an email, a text or even perhaps a tweet. Currently, many interpreters do not have the skills to handle written text, even if their non-English language has a commonly used written form, which many languages do not. Interpreter training programs rarely teach translation skills, nor is it clear that the sort of skills taught to literary translators are the same skills needed for these short, rapid translations. All in all, the move to electronic communications raises a myriad of questions for language access services and creates a fascinating new horizon for interpreters and translators alike.

Conclusion

Healthcare interpreting is certainly not for everyone, but there is tremendous satisfaction in knowing how much one is helping people who are so very much in need of help. This is a field that is still developing, a field that needs skilled linguists, compassionate hearts, creative problem-solvers, and a new generation of leaders.

Further reading

This Code of Ethics was developed with national input and has been adopted by many healthcare institutions across the U.S. It has been translated into Spanish and Japanese as well.

These Standards of Practice, like the Code of Ethics on which they are based, were also developed through a national consensus-building process. They serve as a basis for healthcare interpreter practice throughout the U.S.

The Standards for Training Programs are based on the Standards of Practice. They are, again, the results of a long process of outreach and consultation with experts in the field, including interpreters from all over the U.S.


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INTERPRETING IN MENTAL HEALTH CARE

Hanneke Bot

Introduction

In mental health care, there is a lively debate about whether this type of help should be adapted for patients who have their roots in ‘cultures’ outside the borders of the countries they now live in. For several reasons, I will not enter this debate here. First of all, because it is my strong conviction that people will come to understand one another as soon as they are interested in each other and each other’s backgrounds. Culture, as a consistent pattern of norms and values, does not determine or cause behaviour. It is at best a pattern that one can detect in someone’s behaviour (Verheggen, 2005). Second, related to our topic here, I think that a lot of misunderstanding between people with different national and linguistic backgrounds arises because they literally do not understand one another. Needless to say, you have to have an interest in getting to know each other in order to be willing to bridge the language gap by, for example, engaging an interpreter. The first step towards a (mental) health care that is accessible for all is to establish a well-equipped interpreter service included in insurance-covered care.

This chapter deals with the subtleties of interpreter-mediated talk in mental health care. Interpreting in mental health care is a subcategory of healthcare interpreting (see Chapter 15 on healthcare interpreting). Sometimes there is also an overlap between mental health interpreting and judicial settings (see Chapter 12 on legal interpreting). This happens when patients are admitted to mental health institutions against their will and a judge has to hear the patient and his lawyer in order to make his judgement.

In mental health care, there is hardly any way to diagnose and treat except through language. Not surprisingly, interpreters working in the field of health care are relatively often engaged in mental health sessions. Interpreters are employed in sessions with various mental health providers, each type of session with its own characteristics and demands on the interpreter. This means that interpreters have to adapt their role according to the type of patient and type of session, and also to the idiosyncratic preferences of each individual mental health provider. Constructive cooperation thus depends on the alignment of the mental health provider, the interpreter and their mutual patient. Despite the different styles that are prevalent in the field, the author has a preference for a specific role, based on both theoretical arguments and her own experience, as will become evident in this chapter.
**Definition of terms**

Interpreting in mental health care is done consecutively with patient-interpreter-therapist taking turns one after the other (see Chapter 6 on consecutive interpreting). Interpreting in mental health encounters can be face-to-face or via the telephone. Video-interpreting is not yet widely available in most countries (see Chapter 22 on remote interpreting). In The Netherlands, more than 75% of interpreting in the medical setting, including mental health care, is done via the telephone. A large number of mental health workers are engaged in sessions with patients: psychiatrists, nurses, psychologists, social workers, psychotherapists, etc. I will mostly use the term mental health practitioner/worker; sometimes I will use therapist as a general term, as this is so much shorter, to cover these different specialisms.

**History/early developments**

Interpreter-mediated talk in mental health care came into being years after large numbers of migrant workers, their families, asylum seekers and refugees came to live more or less permanently in countries far from their homesteads. In The Netherlands and many other countries, interpreter services started on a volunteer or semi-professional basis in the 1970s; professionalization set in during the nineties or even as late as the first decade of the third millennium, if at all.

In 2005, I described the situation with respect to interpreting in mental health care as governed by several ‘schools of thought’ (Bot, 2005: 13). Even after the relative explosion of empirical research on interpreting in the medical and judicial field since the 1990s, empirical research, especially research based on recorded sessions, in interpreting in mental health is still very rare. Two meta-studies on the effects of language support for the accessibility and quality of health care by Flores (2005) and Karliner et al. (2007) show that, in general, bringing in well-trained and professional interpreters leads to a significant increase in the accessibility and quality of care. However, these meta-studies are based on a limited number of studies, even more so in the case of mental health care compared to somatic health care. To complicate matters further, in these studies quite often no distinction is made between professional interpreters, family members as interpreters and bilingual nurses who also do a bit of interpreting (see for example Aranguri et al., 2006). Thus, lacking an evidence base on which well-founded statements about interpreting in mental health care can be made, there are still various ways of thinking and working with interpreters in mental health care. In 2013, Bot and Verrept come to the conclusion that ‘unfortunately, there is no literature that – based on empirical research – shows which approach, under which circumstances and for which groups of patients leads to the best results’ (Bot and Verrept, 2013: 118–119).

**Current situation/trends**

**Interpreting is interaction**

Interpreting in mental health care is part of community interpreting, and as such fits in the realm investigated by Wadensjö (1998), who concluded that interpreting is interaction. Through her work, it became clear that interpreting has to be seen as an interaction involving the interpreter, the mental healthcare provider and the patient. As such, interpreting is a form of cooperation.

A myriad of approaches are used in the field, with varying ideas and practices about training, employment, roles and tasks of the interpreter, medium or mode of working (face-to-face versus via the telephone or videoconferencing). All these different approaches, though, can be
categorized within the interactional paradigm: it is the extent of the involvement in the interaction that differs, and related to that the responsibilities, roles and tasks assigned to the interpreter are different. In fact, the various approaches to interpreting can be situated on a continuum of interactional involvement. The position of the interpreter on this continuum influences and in fact pre-supposes a matching position of the mental health practitioner and even of the patient involved (see also Bot 2005).

The continuum of interaction – role behaviour

The involvement of the interpreter in the interaction ranges across a continuum, with the interpreter as a translation-machine on one end and the interpreter as an independent participant at the other (for further discussion for the evolution and continuum of interpreter roles in other subsectors, see Chapters 7, 13, 14 and 15). In order to simplify matters, I describe a number of positions on this continuum. I distinguish the following positions: the interpreter as a translation-machine (TM), the interactive interpreter (II), the interpreter as a cultural mediator (CM); the interpreter as a co-therapist (ICT) and finally the interpreter as an independent participant (IIP) (Figure 16.1).

I understand there can be some debate about my use of the term ‘interpreter’ here as beyond the cultural mediator position, there is so much deviation from the original meaning of ‘giving new words in another language to what has already been said’. ‘Language assistant’ might have been a better term if it had not been a term that is not widely used in practice.

The interpreter as a translation-machine

In this position, it is the interpreter’s role to make equivalent renditions of the primary speakers’ words. The interpreter has no further influence on the communication and holds no other responsibility.

This position implies a monological understanding of language, meaning an emphasis on the everyday, taken-for-granted equivalent meanings of words as they were listed in a dictionary (see Bot and Wadensjö, 2004) and implies the interpreter is an invisible third party who produces equivalent renditions. Based on the communication theories of Watzlawick et al. (1967), we know that ‘not communicating’ in each other’s presence is simply not possible. One who tries to do that, communicates precisely that he does not want to engage. The interactional reality cannot be denied. Also, an equivalent translation, in all its subtleties, is an impossible goal to reach, even in written texts, let alone in the oral act of interpreting. The translation-machine model disregards the fundamental issues involved in translation; translation always involves change (Bakker et al. 1998). As such, the translation-machine model is an illusion – it can never be reached. Still, some practising interpreters and mental health practitioners adhere to this position and formulate it as a model.

As a conscious effort, it is sometimes justified to strive for an exact, maybe even word-for-word translation, as when appointments – hours, dates – or prescriptions for medication are involved. The conviction that the translation-machine position is a reachable goal, assuming that interpreters

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<tr>
<th>TM</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>CM</th>
<th>ICT</th>
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Figure 16.1
are translation-machines, is a dangerous one, however. This conviction discourages a critical questioning of the quality of the communication. It leads the participants in talk to assume that all interpreters’ renditions are equivalent and to disregard signs that there are communication problems (Bot, 2005). In my research data (Bot, 2005), I have seen instances where the patients gave relevant answers to the questions they heard from the interpreter’s mouth. These questions, however, differed in therapeutic intention from the original questions phrased by the therapists. A therapist working from an interactional stance would say, after an apparently inconsistent reaction of the patient, ‘that is not what I meant, I will rephrase my question’. A therapist working from the machine position would not rephrase, maybe would not even notice a communication problem. He would continue his questioning and the session as a whole would end in misunderstanding and an adversarial atmosphere.

**The interactive interpreter**

The underlying assumption here is that of the dialogical understanding of language and mind (see again Bot and Wadensjö, 2004), implying that meaning of words is constructed in interaction. It takes into account that ‘not communicating’ is impossible; it understands that interpreters coordinate talk and meaning (Wadensjö, 1998). Wadensjö’s conclusions were confirmed by my own study (Bot, 2005), which found, also based on empirical research, that interpreters not only influence the structure (having every other turn) and organization of the session, but also have an influence on the content of the dialogue:

> It is important for therapists conducting interpreter-mediated psychotherapy to realize that dialogues are influenced by interpreters: through the act of translation, their deliberate choices to diverge in their renditions and through their own cognitions and emotions. This means that the therapist should take care in attributing what happens in the session to the interaction with the patient alone.

*(Bot, 2005: 252)*

There is little discussion about the unavoidability of the interpreter’s influence. The interpreter’s characteristics (paralinguistic and non-verbal behaviour, appearance) all exert an influence which cannot be erased. On the content level, systemic differences between languages cause inevitable differences between source utterance and rendition, while the understanding of what has been said by the primary partners in talk and thus its rendition are influenced by the interpreter’s knowledge, lexicon, emotions, norms, values, beliefs, etc. In my research data (Bot, 2005) the therapists emphasized several times and with different words, that ‘talking about one’s problems is therapeutic’. Several times these utterances were interpreted properly. But sometimes they were changed into their opposites: ‘it is good to keep quiet to protect the family from bad stories’. Baffled by this phenomenon, I questioned the interpreters. It turned out that they themselves felt that ‘not talking’ was usually better than ‘talking’. It seems that their own values crept into their interpreting, and they had not done this consciously.

Knowing that one’s own feelings and opinions enter one’s interpreting does not always make the extent and content of this influence a conscious one. Interactive interpreters know that ‘understanding meaning’ is a complicated matter and should not be taken for granted. This allows them to ask questions for clarification, ask for a repetition when they did not hear properly what was said and explain terms that are difficult to translate.

Wadensjö and I (Wadensjö, 1998; Bot and Wadensjö, 2004; Bot, 2005) conclude that in practice interpreting is interactive, whether one likes that or not. Thus, this view of the interpreter is undeniable.
The cultural mediator

In this position, ‘it is assumed that the interpreter is knowledgeable about matters that are relevant for the healthcare contact and that it will be beneficial to the healthcare encounter if he brings this in. … Without some clarification of the cultural context in which the messages are exchanged, these can sometimes be perceived as “complete nonsense” by both the native healthcare worker and the foreign patient. The intercultural mediation role becomes more important as the languages in question differ more from each other and the cultural and socio-economic distance between patient and healthcare worker is greater’ (Bot and Verrept, 2013: 123).

In the above-mentioned example about therapists’ emphasis on ‘talking about your problems’ as being beneficial to one’s mental health, an intercultural mediator could make a difference if he could explain the underlying idea to the patient to help him enter the therapeutic process. The difference with the interactive model is thus that the interpreter consciously and overtly adds information to the interaction.

This implies that the cultural mediator possesses knowledge about mental health, therapeutic techniques and processes, and about the ‘cultural’ beliefs and opinions the patient may have. It is still unclear what this involvement should precisely involve and how interpreters could be prepared for this task. ‘Ethnic origin alone is not sufficient to have a thorough knowledge of one’s cultural group. If intercultural mediators are not sufficiently prepared, one runs the risk that their own opinions, based on their more or less accidental experiences, will be presented as knowledge of the culture’ (Bot and Verrept, 2013: 123). It is also complicated because it takes a lot of time and is therefore not very ‘economical’ when interpreters also have to interpret their own input. The less the ‘everything will be translated’ paradigm is followed, the stronger the influence of the interpreter on the session will be, with the interpreter making influential choices about what will be or not be interpreted, thus moving even further to the right in the continuum, towards the position of the co-therapist or even the independent participant in talk.

The interpreter as a co-therapist

An interpreter who acts as a co-therapist has, alongside his training as an interpreter, been trained in the areas of social work, psychotherapy or psychiatry. In this position, the therapist and the interpreter co-therapist work closely together to find acceptable and culturally appropriate ways of working with the patient (see Mudarikiri, 2003).

In situations in which working with a co-therapist is indicated anyway – e.g. family or group therapy or very complicated cases – and language barriers do exist, this could be the working position of choice. The French psychiatrist Moro works with this model in group therapy with migrants in Paris, as can be seen on her DVD J’ai rêvé d’une grande étendue d’eau (www.marierosemoro.fr – accessed 17 Oct 2014).

The interpreter as an independent participant

The end position on the continuum of interaction is the interpreter as an independent participant. In such cases, interpreters insert their own comments, stemming from their personal experiences or knowledge. It is a position that gets little attention in training and literature, as it is never included in the role and task of the interpreter. It is ostensibly non-existent, but it is a position that any interpreter sometimes assumes. This role can be played in a way that relates to the session, for example when a new appointment has to be made and the interpreter checks his or her own agenda. But it also happens that comments are an independent addition to the session,
related or not related to the topic at hand, interpreted or not to all participants in talk. An example of this stems from my own experience: in a session my patient was crying a lot and the interpreter took the initiative to console her, gave her a tissue, patted her on the arm, and said comforting words. If I had felt the same, it would not have been too much of a problem. But I felt that the crying was excessive and should stop as it was an impediment to constructive work. The interpreter’s behaviour made it difficult for me to follow my strategy.

Discussion

The different positions on the continuum suppose a difference in responsibility for the communication in the mental health encounter. In the translation-machine position, the emphasis is on therapist and patient ‘to sort out their problems’. A translation-machine interpreter would not rectify an obvious error nor even point it out. Mental health practitioners and patients have the responsibility to notice any problems that occur, and they are able to do so because the interpreter gives equivalent translations. Therapist, patient and interpreter all have clearly defined and separated roles.

Moving along the continuum to the right, the influence of the interpreter increases as the interaction becomes more and more three-party talk. The input of the interpreter could be restricted to its inevitable influence on the content of the conversation through the interpretation and the interpreter’s very presence; a step further is in explaining certain words or terms which do not have a direct equivalent in the target language. It can further stretch out to include statements about habits, norms and values that are related to the patient’s or the health system’s background; and can go all the way to the interpreter making independent therapeutic interventions and adding personal remarks. The more the interpreter moves to the right on the continuum, the more two-faceted the role becomes: as someone who interprets everything that is said and at the same time as someone with autonomous input. The more one moves to the right, the more complicated the situation becomes, especially because the more independent input the interpreter has, the less it will be possible to render all that was said to all participants.

In theory, one can distinguish the various positions as models and specifically find a separation between the interactive interpreter and the cultural mediator. There is a gap between the un- or semi-conscious interaction of the interactive interpreter and the fully conscious and explicit interventions cultural mediators and independent participants make. Interpreters and the institutions they work for usually select a certain position on this continuum: their official model of working. In practice, though, interpreters move along the entire continuum, and these roles are more blurred, even in a single session. For example, interpreters working from an interactive stance do sometimes throw in a remark, in addition to what was said, or sometimes even a personal supplement. Because of this, I prefer to see it as one model: an interactional one, in which one can distinguish different positions.

The interpreter and the mental health practitioner

Interpreters always work together with other professionals and their patients/clients. They have to select their way of working in conjunction with their participants in talk. Bot (2005) emphasizes the importance of the interpreter and the mental health practitioner working in the same position along the continuum. If expectations about one another’s roles do not match, irritation will ensue. Mental health practitioners work in very different styles. In fact, they have their own continuum of interaction.
The classical Freudian position is the therapist as a ‘therapy-machine’. That is to say: sessions are carried out focussing on the problems and feelings of the patient while the mental health practitioner abstains from any personal involvement. Of course, therapists are not machines either. In practice, their own feelings and (unconscious) cognitions and norms do influence their interventions; every therapist will have a different interpretation of the prescribed ways of working (see: interactive interpreter). Especially in the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees, some mental health practitioners, overwhelmed by the number of traumas and the often miserable social situation of their patients, show an involvement that goes much further than official professional standards (the therapist as an independent participant). Therapists have contact with patients outside the official settings, make phone calls for them, lend them money or give them amulets, et cetera (see for a good example of these practices Mirdal et al., 2012). Whether or not these transgressions of formal boundaries are acceptable, they occur in the daily practice of mental health work. Matching ideas between therapist and interpreter about how to carry out their jobs is a prerequisite for constructive cooperation in the session (Bot, 2005). To complicate matters even further, therapists may also move along their own continuum, even in one session.

Cooperation

Both interpreters and mental health workers use various ways of working with patients; both professionals can be more or less involved as persons in the interaction. Depending on the type of patient, the type of institution and its philosophy, and the therapist’s own idiosyncrasies, a method of working will be selected and the interpreter will be expected to match it. It is important that therapist and interpreter manage to adjust their styles to one another.

Here is an example of how this cooperation takes place and how the balance can become disturbed. A therapist, dedicated to the interactive interpreter model, tells me she can deal with brief interruptions, related to difficult-to-translate terms or the interpreter not immediately understanding or hearing what was said. From this position, she can also deal with an interpreter who inserts explanations of what the patient just said. Her usual reaction would be to react with ‘the interpreter just said … how do you feel/think about that?’, and ask the interpreter to translate that. But the balance gets disrupted when, in a session, the interpreter inserts his or her own comment – which sometimes happens. She tells me that this completely throws her off balance, the focus on the patient is disrupted, suddenly there is someone else’s input; there is another line of conversation next to that with the patient.

On the other hand, interpreters sometimes feel stifled by their role as ‘translators’; they feel they have so much knowledge the session may benefit from and feel frustrated when they cannot intervene. They focus on the cultural mediator position and are disturbed when a therapist does not welcome their input. Therapists wanting to know whether the behaviour or feelings of their patients are related to their background ask interpreters for information and feel irritated when the interpreter is not willing to give this. An interpreter who leans toward the translation-machine position may be unsettled when a therapist inserts an ‘off-the-record remark’ or asks the interpreter a question; this may pose a dilemma – interpret or not? – for the interpreter. An interpreter told me that he had been engaged in a systems therapy session with a 12-year-old child, his mother and the therapist. When talking about musical instruments to raise the boy’s interest in playing music, the therapist asked the interpreter ‘what other instruments does one have?’. The interpreter felt ill at ease, answered the question but felt bad about that later on. He felt he should have refused to answer. But that might have disrupted the flow of the session.
We see that a mismatch between mental health practitioner and interpreter leads to ‘trouble’: irritation, loss of concentration, ‘feeling bad’ afterwards and the like. Fine-tuning between the two professionals can happen when both understand these dynamics and are willing to adapt.

**Empathy, emotions, attitude**

In the previous section I examined the overt role behaviour of interpreters and therapists. Whether a mental health session and cooperation between therapist and interpreter ‘works’ is, however, also shaped by their paralinguistic and non-verbal behaviour. One may call it attitude and the overall ‘fit’ of the relationship. In general, empathy with the patient is the guiding tone in the mental health encounter: empathy with his situation, his feelings, his strengths, his inadequacies and weaknesses, etc. Empathy is shaped in the words the therapist speaks, but it is also formed by paralinguistic and non-verbal behaviour. Therapists are trained to pay attention to these aspects of the communication; for interpreters, however, this is much less the case. It is important that interpreter and therapist are also fine-tuned in this respect. It is hard to outline precisely what this entails, but at the same time it is clear that this is a delicate and important issue.

A committee dealing with complaints about interpreters in asylum hearings concludes that most complaints dealt not so much with inadequate ‘translations’, but with issues of ‘attitude’. It became apparent that ‘the boundary between a friendly intended smile and a grimace, between helpful and interfering behaviour, was dangerously thin’.

*(Hyams in IND, 2009; my translation)*

Interpreters should be aware of their body language and, especially when working via the telephone, their intonation, diction and other paralinguistic factors, as they are very important in shaping the ‘feel’ of the encounter.

For therapists and interpreters to cooperate, it is necessary, as far as expressions of emotion are concerned, that the interpreter and therapist are consistent (Bot, 2005). It becomes confusing for the patient and in general not conducive to effective therapy when, for example, the interpreter laughs about something the patient says while the therapist feels there is nothing to laugh about. Not to mention even the confusion that occurs when interpreters make clear in non-verbal behaviour that they do not approve of the therapist’s interventions.

**The words – translation in mental health encounters**

Words are important in mental health care: diagnosis and treatment is largely based on the words exchanged between care practitioner and patient. In general, in order to interpret the words in an encounter well, one should have knowledge of the encounter’s interactional purposes and the specific conversational techniques that will be used to meet this purpose. The mental health field is vast and differentiated, so it is difficult to list, within limited space, what all this entails.

In order to give an overview, I divide the field into two parts: psychological therapies and communication with psychotic patients.

**Psychological treatment**

Very, very generally, the psychological field can be divided into two parts: the structured, so called protocolized treatments and the more unstructured counselling therapies. The structured therapies include, among other forms, cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) and eye movement
desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR); counselling therapies consist of psychodynamic and experiential/client-centred therapies.

All therapies are based on a theory – a set of assumptions – which are translated into treatment practices. Structured therapies usually use specific terms to instruct their patients, to phrase interventions and to measure progress. Counselling therapies emphasize the importance of the working relationship between therapist and patient and the importance of re-wording experiences. Both types may focus on the patient’s own experiencing of feelings.

In general, therapists explain their way of working and its rationale to the patient. This also helps the interpreter to understand the purpose of the session. Of course, interpreting is facilitated when interpreters are aware of certain specific terms that are being used and have familiarized themselves with their rendition in the target language. I analysed a corpus of six video-recorded interpreter-mediated counselling sessions (Bot, 2005) and found that a number of problematic renditions were most probably due to the fact that the interpreter was unaware of the general goal of this type of session (see example ‘talking’ versus ‘not talking’).

Psychotic patients

Not surprisingly, there is no empirical research about interpreting in sessions with psychotic patients. Often these sessions are not planned ahead, and the patients are in no position to consent to participate in research and have the session recorded. It is thus very difficult and maybe even impossible to conduct research while adhering to ethical standards. There is, however, much psychiatric literature about the ways that psychotic patients talk, distorted from the ‘ordinary’ in both content and formulation. Psychotic patients’ talk can be disorganized, incoherent; the patient has difficulty organizing his thoughts, he may skip from one thought to another, losing the thread of his story; he may be highly associative, for example linking words not because of their meaning but their sound (which, of course, is usually not the same in the target language). Another problem can be that the patient uses uncommon words or expressions or even neologisms and expressions that do not exist. Also, patients may repeat themselves, or repeat what the interpreter just said. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to describe in any detail all the different ways in which speech can be distorted. One thing is certain: the mental health practitioner is interested to hear what the patient has to say and how he says it, and the interpreter will have great trouble making equivalent renditions.

In these cases, it is inevitable for the interpreter to meta-communicate: to describe the patient’s talk. By doing so, the interpreter moves considerably to the right on the continuum of interaction, and necessarily so.

Conclusion

As stated above, lacking vast quantities of empirical research in which interpreted sessions using the various positions are investigated, it is not possible to give evidence-based advice about which position is best to adopt in which type of talk (see also Bot and Verrept 2013).

Based on theoretical grounds and on my own experiences in practice, I do have a preference. The starting point is that, although of course interpreters have their own professional responsibility, the health practitioner is ultimately responsible for the treatment of the patient. On top of that, I do not favour a cultural stance: I believe such information should be obtained through contact with the individual patient. As stated in Bot and Verrept (2013: 125) I see potential problems for cultural mediators in the mental healthcare sector. … One can expect healthcare workers … to be curious about the patient’s background, his views about his symptoms and his feelings about the appropriate remedy for them. Providing an explanation on one’s work methods,
flexibility and the ability to adjust to the patient and his needs and circumstances – as well as being able to work eclectically – is also all part of good healthcare provision.’ A cultural mediator would thus be superfluous; it is the therapist who, through contact with the patient, learns about his background, habits, norms and values. The treatment is best served with an interpreter who stays close to the source language structure and who calls attention to any problems in hearing and understanding which can subsequently be solved by communicating about them with all parties involved.

Therefore, my preference is that both therapist and interpreter strive for the left side of the continuum: knowing that of course they have a personal influence and incorporating that in their cooperation, but trying hard to maintain the role division of the patient talking about his life and problems, the therapist making therapeutic interventions and the interpreter interpreting everything that is said. In this way, therapist and patient can find out to what extent they understand one another and sort out their communication problems themselves. If there are problems in understanding one another because of differences in background, education, socio-economic status, habits and the like, these will become apparent in the interpreter’s renditions. The therapist can then make a choice about how to deal with these differences. Interpreters should take pride in their role of interpreting closely, acknowledging that their renditions are never completely equivalent and leaving the content of the session as much as possible to the therapist and the patient.

Only rarely, for example in communication with severely disturbed patients, should the interpreter adopt another role, i.e. a more active, meta-communicative role. Also in this role, the interpreter should focus exclusively on the language part of the job, explain how the patient uses language. The interpreter is a language and communications expert, not a habit, values and norms expert.

With respect to paralingual, non-verbal behaviour and the expression of emotions, I think it is reasonable to say that the interpreter should closely follow the therapist.

All this implies that both therapists and interpreters should have knowledge about the dynamics of their cooperation. On top of this, therapists should understand that interpreting has little to do with word-for-word translation and understand the intricacies of interpreting; interpreters need background knowledge about mental health care – diagnoses, terminology, treatment practices and their objectives – in order to be able to interpret well.

At present, many an interpreter and nearly all mental health practitioners lack education and training in how to move along the continuum of interaction in their cooperation. They also lack background knowledge about their respective areas of expertise. Therapists are often shockingly unaware of the ‘trade’ of interpreting – they verbalize translation-machine ideas while at the same time they do not shy away from using the interpreter as a co-therapist or informant. As a result, finding a matching position on the continuum is often difficult. Both professionals lack the words to define their cooperation. The challenge for the future lies in training both interpreters and mental health practitioners in this area. In the training of healthcare practitioners a lot of attention is paid to communication – as it is understood very well that good communication lies at the basis of good healthcare. ‘Bridging the language gap’ should be part of that training. Likewise, interpreters should be trained in the principles of (mental) health care.

Further reading


One of the few sources exclusively dedicated to interpreting in mental health.

One of the seminal works in interpreting studies.

## References


INTERPRETING IN EDUCATION

Melissa B. Smith

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of interpreting in educational settings. Not only may interpreters find themselves working with students, parents, and staff in infant or pre-school programs, primary or secondary schools and institutions of higher education, they may find further work opportunities in vocational and adult education or in professional development venues such as conferences, workshops, seminars, and conventions. While the issues presented will apply to all of these settings, interpreting in primary, secondary and post-secondary education will provide the framework for this discussion. Because of legislative mandates for inclusion of Deaf and hard of hearing students in public education, many signed-language interpreters work in educational settings. As a result, much of the research cited is gleaned from the field of signed-language interpretation. However, the challenges in effectively meeting the needs of English Language Learners being educated in the United States and immigrant students learning the language of host countries all over the world in many ways parallel those of Deaf and hard of hearing students.

This chapter will discuss academic achievement in both of these student populations, recognizing that when students depend on interpreters for access to academic and social discourse in educational contexts, interpreters must be prepared to respond to the unique learning needs of dual language learners. As such, the training of spoken- and signed-language interpreters must be both broad enough to prepare them to accurately interpret a wide array of academic content and rich enough to adequately understand the intricacies of interpreting for students with varied language proficiencies in their primary language as well as in the language of accountability.

A note on terminology

As noted in Chapter 7 on sign language interpreting, the word Deaf is often written with a capital “D” and will be used as such throughout this chapter. Padden and Humphries (1988) initially introduced a capital “D” to refer to the group of Deaf people who share a common culture and American Sign Language (ASL). The distinction of deaf with a small “d” has been widely used to refer to deafness as an audiological condition. “Deaf” is an expression that recognizes the shared experiences of those who share the values, norms, and beliefs of Deaf Culture. In this chapter I have chosen to use Deaf and hard of hearing, out of respect for those who generally identify with
the Deaf Culture and those who typically identify with the hearing world but still use sign language as a primary means of communication.

**Where educational interpreters work**

Interpreters work in a wide array of educational settings. They work in primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools to interpret between students, staff, faculty, administrators, parents or guardians, and/or other stakeholders. For spoken language interpreters, the most common form of interpreting in these venues is between parents who do not speak the language of the school and teachers or other staff. For example, they might interpret for parent/teacher conferences, school-wide assemblies and special programs, back to school nights, or commencement and award ceremonies. Signed-language interpreters, on the other hand, frequently work full-time in educational settings, as they interpret for students throughout their daily activities. Other signed-language interpreters interpret between Deaf teachers and hearing parents and school personnel, perhaps interpreting class content into spoken English, or interpreting meetings or school-wide events.

Interpreters might also work in vocational trainings or adult education classes. Conferences and workshops provide another source of employment for both spoken- and signed-language interpreters, as professionals in every field are expected to seek professional development opportunities. Many professions, in fact, require a certain number of hours per year of continuing education to retain licensure and/or certification.

Court-ordered trainings, such as parenting, substance abuse, or anger management classes may also result in a need for qualified interpreters. Additionally, many larger health institutions now provide opportunities for patients to learn about and/or manage various wellness concerns through clinics and classes.

Employers are another potential source for interpreting services. Many businesses provide periodic trainings for their employees. In many companies, for example, the safety of workers is a high priority and safety training must be provided. Technological advances or a decision to use new equipment, software, or protocols may result in yet another need for employers to convey essential information to their employees. Clearly, interpreters must be equipped to effectively interpret in a myriad of educational contexts.

Hiring practices, however, may belie the importance of the professional skills required of educational interpreters. For example, although interpreting in schools is a prevalent practice and predominant source of employment for many signed-language interpreters, permanent jobs for spoken language interpreters in educational settings are scarce. Furthermore, postings for employment vacancies requiring interpretation skills may be unclear. For example, interpreter positions in schools may fall under a range of categories including: (1) Other classified, (2) Language, Hearing, and Speech, (3) Teacher Assistant/Aide/Paraprofessional, and (4) Clerical/Secretarial Staff/Office Technician. These categories and the subsequent descriptions of the positions indicate ambiguous role expectations and raise questions and concerns relating to language proficiency and interpreter qualifications required of candidates. Compensation standards vary considerably as well, ranging from $10 to $35 an hour depending on certification and qualification (California County Superintendents Educational Services Association, 2013), which may reflect a lack of consistency in the quality of service provided.

In fact, many interpretation needs in schools are provided by instructional aides who happen to be fluent in the student’s language (e.g., Spanish-speaking aides assigned to classrooms that have one or more students whose home language is Spanish). Yet one may ask whether being a speaker of a language is sufficient to effectively meet the unique language needs of dual
language learners, to understand and remain faithful to effective pedagogical strategies, to respectfully mediate cross-cultural interactions, to promote active participation, to facilitate peer interactions, and to accurately interpret academic and social discourse.

**Educational interpreter training and qualifications**

Unfortunately, as a result of legislation, supply and demand, and public perceptions, interpreters working in public schools in the U.S. have historically been under-qualified and under-prepared. In fact, many people hired to interpret in schools have not yet mastered their working languages.

**Effects of legislation**

The demand for interpreters as a result of legislative mandates for inclusion of Deaf and hard of hearing students in educational, social service, government, employment, and business sectors between 1976 and 1990 (e.g., Public Law 94-142 or the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act) rapidly exceeded the supply of working American Sign Language-English interpreters.

The historical view of interpreting as a volunteer service (e.g., provided by family members, classroom aides or volunteers) (see Chapter 27 for further discussion of non-professional interpreters) and the corresponding lack of esteem afforded to the profession, coupled with the exponential increase in demand created by legislation, have made it difficult for school districts to offer attractive compensation rates in competition with standard rates for business and industry. Higher pay rates in other settings lure highly qualified interpreters away from schools. As a result, school districts tend to hire from a pool of less qualified applicants. According to Monikowski and Winston (2003: 354):

> Unfortunately, many environments, most notably the public education system, have failed to move toward recognition of certified interpreters. For many years, the common practice has been to place those not yet ready to interpret for adults in the schools with deaf children … Unwilling to pay for professional, skilled interpreters [and often unable to find them, the schools] have allowed these unskilled people to work without certification or evaluation of any kind.

A growing literature shows that interpreters are exceptionally unprepared for the realities of interpreting in educational settings (Foster, 1988; Hurwitz, 1991; Johnson, 1991; Jones, 1993, 1994, 2004; Kurz and Langer, 2004; La Bue, 1998; Mertens, 1990; Russell, 2008, 2011; Russell and Winston, 2012; Schein, 1992; Schick, Williams, and Bolster, 1999; Schick, Williams and Kupermintz, 2006; Stewart and Kluwin, 1996; Taylor, 2005; Togioka, 1990; Yarger, 2001). In fact, until recently, schools were required only to provide a “qualified” interpreter, with no guidelines as to what skills and knowledge must be demonstrated (see Chapters 23 and 24 on quality and assessment of interpreters, respectively). Yet according to Russell (2014), “Increasingly Deaf children are educated in settings with a sign language interpreter, which is perceived as making the educational environment inclusive. This makes education one of the largest employers of sign language interpreters.”

In 1991, and in response to a need for an evaluation designed to assess the interpreting skills of individuals working with students in school settings, Boys Town National Research Hospital in Omaha, Nebraska, designed and piloted an assessment instrument called the Educational Interpreting in education
Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA). Currently, at least 29 U.S. states use the EIPA to meet state qualification standards for educational sign language interpreters working in primary and secondary settings. According to the EIPA website (retrieved 4/18/14 from http://www.classroominterpreting.org/eipa/performance/index.asp), candidates who take this assessment are rated on:

- **Grammatical skills:** Use of prosody (or intonation), grammar, and space.
- **Sign-to-voice interpreting skills:** Ability to understand and convey child/teen sign language.
- **Vocabulary:** Ability to use a wide range of vocabulary, accurate use of fingerspelling and numbers.
- **Overall abilities:** Ability to represent a sense of the entire message, use appropriate discourse structures, and represent who is speaking.

As recently as 2004, only thirteen states required interpreters working in public schools to achieve at least a 3.5 on a 5-point Likert scale in order to meet minimum qualification standards. A score of 3.5 is characterized as a “coherent” interpretation. According to the test developers, an individual scoring a 3.5 would have “frequent errors in grammar, vocabulary, and rhythm and prosody, which could lead to misunderstandings, lack of knowledge, and misinformation in the student’s education” (Schick et al., 1999: 148). Schick further cautions that interpreters who “produce a message that is missing parts of the original message are not typically making principled omissions. That is, many interpreters are not making decisions that will preserve the most important information for the lesson. In addition, information is not just missing; it is also distorted, confused, and sometimes just wrong” (2004: 82). In contrast, an individual scoring a 5 “demonstrates broad and fluent use of vocabulary, with a broad range of strategies for communicating new words and concepts. Sign production errors are minimal and never interfere with comprehension. An individual at this level is capable of clearly and accurately conveying the majority of interactions within the classroom.” In addition, interpreters who score a 5 have demonstrated mastery of complex grammatical constructions and can communicate all details of a signed message.

In spite of the concerns of many interpreter educators and the test developers that a score of 3.5 is too low, several states have determined that a 3.5 or less is sufficient to meet employment qualification standards for interpreters in primary and secondary schools (known as K-12 in the U.S.). Much of the reluctance to set the bar higher has to do with recognition of the fact that the nation’s educational interpreting workforce has been, by and large, under-qualified.

In fact, one study showed that the interpreting skills of more than half of 59 employed educational interpreters working in public schools in Colorado were actually below 3.5 on the 5.0 EIPA scale, even though a 3.5 EIPA score was the state’s minimum entry level standard (Schick et al., 1999). In another study of 63 interpreters working in K-12 schools in two rural states, Yarger (2001) found that the 43 interpreters assessed using the EIPA achieved a mean score of 2.6. Only ten of the interpreters had completed interpreter training programs and only five of those had had any coursework related to education. Clearly, such unqualified and under-qualified interpreters would not be able to interpret accurately enough for students who depend on interpreters to access social and academic discourse to succeed in educational environments.

Fortunately, more states are defining and raising qualification standards. In 2012, a national project funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) reported that four states required K-12 interpreters to achieve at least a 3.0 on the EIPA, thirteen states a 3.5 (with one more state giving its workforce until January 2014 to
achieve this level), and ten states a 4.0 or above (Johnson et al., 2012). Some states, like Texas, require candidates to pass a rigorous state test unless they hold national certification.

There is still a long way to go, but in the past decade, there has been tremendous progress in implementing minimum standards of qualification for signed-language interpreters. To date, however, there are no such standards for spoken language interpreters in education.

**Specialization: Skills and training**

Chapter 25 discusses many available options for interpreter training, but there are few opportunities to specialize as an interpreter in educational contexts. In fact, a web search reveals only one or two university programs for spoken language and a handful for signed-language interpreting focused on working in educational settings. Other colleges may offer a course or dedicate some class time to preparing students for work in educational contexts, but there is no identifiable curriculum designed to teach this particular specialization. Complicating matters further, not all educators in interpreting programs have backgrounds in educational interpreting themselves (see Chapter 25 for discussion of the training of trainers), so they may not be able to address the critical information about the teaching and learning contexts that the educational interpreters need to know to ensure school success for students who are dual language learners.

**Understanding dual language learners and primary language experiences**

It has been estimated that 75% of Deaf and hard of hearing students depend upon signed-language interpreters to access social and academic discourse in schools (Marschark, et al., 2005). In order to more adequately prepare interpreters to work effectively in educational settings, it is important to recognize the complexity of the task. Not only do interpreters need to master two working languages and language style variations as well as the complex processes of interpreting, they also need knowledge about the goals of educational settings and how to promote teaching and learning in general. Moreover, they need to understand how these principles apply to dual language learners with unique learning needs.

It is necessary to highlight some of the similarities and differences between the language experiences of Deaf and hard of hearing students in comparison with other dual language learners, such as those who immigrate from other countries with their families. While most children are exposed to the language of the parents from the moment they are born (if not earlier), most Deaf and hard of hearing children have hearing parents (Mitchell and Karchmer, 2004). The vast majority of these parents do not know a signed language and therefore are not able to serve as fluent language models for their children during critical years for language acquisition (Marschark et al., 2002). For these reasons, it is crucial for interpreters working with very young Deaf and hard of hearing children to be extremely proficient in their working languages and to model both social and academic language in a way that is accessible to these children. Moreover, interpreters working with children who are language delayed must understand language acquisition and be able to make decisions which will promote language as well as cognitive, social and emotional development.

In contrast, hearing children have the obvious advantage of constant and consistent exposure to at least one spoken language. (This advantage is also provided in homes where both parents are already fluent in a signed language, such as in homes with two Deaf parents who sign or in the rare case in which two hearing parents sign fluently.) However, many children of immigrants, especially refugees, have undergone traumatic experiences and physical or socio-educational deprivations that may have impeded their learning. Even after settling in a host country, they
may not necessarily be exposed to the rich language environments of children who reside in more stable households. Proficient language models that are equipped to address the unique needs of these dual language learners are essential for promoting the success of these students in academic and highly interactive school contexts. Because interpreters are often the most proficient language models with whom these children consistently interact in school settings, the most highly qualified interpreters should be recruited to work with language-deprived or -delayed students.

**Multiple functions of discourse in schools**

Significant research has been conducted on the patterns of discourse used in academic settings. Much of this research has been informed by socio-linguistic theories that illuminate the social construction of language and power. Other research has emphasized the multiple functions of discourse in schools and has brought to light the fact that students whose discourse styles and funds of knowledge are aligned with those of the schools are better equipped to succeed than students whose discourse styles differ.

The ways in which children learn to access information at home and the values of discourse styles in the home environment have a significant impact on their school experiences. Students whose home talk corresponds highly with school talk will have an easier transition into the learning environment of schools. In order to be academically successful, students have to know not only the meaning of words, but accepted forms and patterns of dialogue in school contexts, and discourse cues that dictate when it is appropriate to speak up and participate or when to remain quiet (Cazden, 1988; Heath, 1983; Mehan, 1979). Interpreters working in these environments must understand, recognize, and be able to clearly convey these discourse patterns in their interpretations.

**Deaf and hard of hearing students and inclusion (or the illusion of inclusion)**

Citing the social nature of learning (Vygotsky, 1978), some researchers call into question the extent to which an interpreted education promotes the cognitive, linguistic, or social development of Deaf and hard of hearing students (Hyde and Power, 2004; Ramsey, 1997, 2004; Schick, 2004; Winston, 2004). Because many Deaf and hard of hearing students are raised in non-signing families, they often have limited access to funds of knowledge from their homes and communities and are not as likely to have the cultural and linguistic capital that leads to school success. Furthermore, little is known about how academic and discourse norms must be adjusted to include a third party who mediates communication, especially when the third party interpreter is not a native user of the language used to access discourse, in this case American Sign Language or other form of sign language.

Schools are highly social environments in which students create communities of learners that become a resource for continued learning. Schick (2004: 83) explains, “Access is not just about what the teacher says … A child who can access conversations with peers only by using an interpreter may have reduced opportunities to engage in authentic, rich discussions and debate with peers. These kinds of experiences are essential for cognitive development for any child or youth.” In addition, since language is the channel for socio-emotional growth, cognitive and academic development, and the transmission of culture, it is important to look at how interpreters impact learning opportunities.

Of primary concern to researchers who have observed interpreters in academic settings is the degree to which Deaf and hard of hearing students can participate in interactions and
question-asking in a predominantly hearing classroom (La Bue, 1998; Ramsey, 1997; Russell and Winston, 2012). The La Bue study of Deaf and hard of hearing students who are mainstreamed in public school classrooms is the most in-depth description of an interpreter-mediated education in secondary educational environments to date. This study is an illuminates some the challenges faced by students who rely on interpreters in educational contexts. The findings provide a thorough evidential basis to support Ramsey’s (1997) observation that Deaf children using interpreters are often left out of classroom interactions, and that discourse strategies used by instructors may not be conveyed. Some of the significant implications of La Bue’s study are that Deaf students, and all students who access school discourse using unqualified interpreters or those who are not making principled decisions that “preserve the most important information for the lesson” (Schick, 2004), are often left to re-interpret the content of a message – placing a much higher cognitive load on these students than their peers – and that they may be relegated to bystander status rather than being afforded equal opportunities for interacting with their teachers and peers in an academic environment.

As with any practice profession such as medicine, law, education, or mental health, “careful consideration and judgment regarding situational and human interaction factors are central to doing effective work” (Dean and Pollard, 2005: 259). Dean and Pollard (2006) suggest that an ethical response must first consider the context of the situation in which the interpreted interaction takes place and decisions must be made that are in service of and aligned with the goals of the setting. They explain that an essential first step when discussing ethical practice is to understand the intricacies of the situation that calls for response within the context of the interpreted interaction. It is only then that interpreters can make appropriate and ethical decisions regarding practice.

Roles and responsibilities of educational interpreters

The role of educational interpreter is not always clearly defined (Kurz and Langer, 2004; Langer, 2004; Hayes, 1992; Hurwitz, 1995; Taylor and Elliott, 1994; Yarger, 2001; Zawolkow and DeFiore, 1986). Educational interpreters are often faced with additional obligations besides interpreting (Smith, 2013). Jones (2004) suggests that K-12 interpreters need qualifications beyond merely the linguistic task of interpreting. He explains that three additional roles educational interpreters typically fulfill on a daily basis include tutoring, consulting, and serving as an aide in the classroom, which he points out “all school personnel are expected to do” (ibid.: 122). He states that confusion may result from overlapping or apparently conflicting roles.

Research has also indicated that interpreters are responsible for clarifying teachers’ instructions, facilitating interaction between peers, tutoring, and keeping administrators and other members of the educational team informed about student progress (Antia and Kreimeyer, 2001). Some interpreters report providing consultation by asking permission in advance to interrupt a teacher’s lecture to request rephrasing in different words so that the concept can be more clearly conveyed to the students (Mertens, 1990).

Other conflicts and contradictions in expectations are evidenced in the literature about interpreters in K-12 settings. Role conflict is a particular source of frustration for many interpreters in educational settings, especially when the range of roles conflicts with the interpreter’s primary obligation of interpreting or preparing to interpret (Hayes, 1992; Metzger and Fleetwood, 2004). Kurz and Langer (2004) report one high school student’s description of how his interpreters provided extensive tutoring help during elementary school, gradually withdrawing support as he progressed through middle school and higher grades. He said, “In high school, they only help you if you really need it. I am now working on asking my teachers...
more than my interpreters if I have questions. I need to learn to rely on the teachers more in college, so this is good practice” (ibid.: 17). Older students in the same study “… wanted their interpreters to draw the line at interpreting” (ibid.: 18).

Some of the students in the Kurz and Langer study reported seemingly contradictory opinions and beliefs about what educational interpreters should do. For example, some students expressed a desire not to be singled out, but others said that interpreters should advocate for students when they are not able to advocate for themselves. Some students wanted space, but lamented the fact that interpreters were not always there when they wanted to interact in social situations, or available to interpret informal conversations before and after class (ibid.: 20). Some researchers call into question the effect that the presence of a third party adult such as an interpreter will inevitably have on peer interactions between deaf and hearing students (Schick 2004).

Mertens (1990) found that the concerns about appropriate roles reported by Deaf adolescents resulted in feelings of dissatisfaction regarding their interpreters. Specifically, “the interpreters were helping discipline the students and providing clarifying comments when they felt the students did not understand” (ibid.: 51). Some students wanted interpreters to interpret everything and to allow them to make their own decisions, including whether to interrupt the teacher to clarify or get more information, and whether or not to pay attention. Interpreters, in contrast, felt that it was appropriate to tell the students to pay attention. The reality may be that if some interpreters over-step appropriate bounds when disciplining students, negative feelings between the students and their interpreters could be detrimental to the relationship needed to effectively participate in an interpreter-mediated education. On the other hand, doing and saying nothing when students (hearing or Deaf) are behaving inappropriately, threateningly, or unsafely is likely to be just as harmful. Other students do not want interpreters to help the Deaf students because hearing students do not get extra help (Kurz and Langer, 2004). Yet tutoring is reported as being a primary role of many K-12 interpreters. Jones (2004: 122) posits that in some cases, “tutoring may be more appropriate than interpreting for some students.”

**Accessibility of an interpreted education**

Research on what interpreters do in the classroom is scarce, resulting in an incomplete understanding of how to prepare educational interpreters to effectively meet the needs of Deaf and hard of hearing students in academic contexts. Winston (1994, 2004) analyzed several classroom interactions and identified situational educational contexts that would likely pose challenges for interpreters of signed-languages. She identified several realities that she hypothesized would make it difficult for Deaf and hard of hearing students who rely on interpreters to access all instruction and classroom communication necessary to truly experience full inclusion.

Winston posited that the time delay inherent to interpretation would significantly reduce the ability of those dependent upon the interpretation to interact fully, as would the phenomenon of overlapping dialogue, and the presence of multiple sources of visual input. Interpreters cannot interpret effectively into a target language until they have analyzed an incoming message, or source message, for its meaning. Research has shown that the number of errors in an interpretation increased as the amount of lag time decreased (Cokely, 1986). One result of this necessary delay in order to render an accurate interpretation is that there are issues of timing when it comes to interpreting between spoken and signed modalities.

These timing delays are perhaps most salient in a classroom context, which emphasize question and answer formats for demonstrating learning and the development of self-esteem. For example, if a teacher wants to ask students to respond to a question, by the time the interpreter has a
chance to process the question for meaning and begin to sign the question, the students who can hear and understand the teacher directly have already called out responses. The teacher may even begin writing the answer on the board or providing a visual cue indicating the answer such as nodding her head to signify the correct response. The time delay interpreters need to process the incoming message could very well cause students who need to wait for an interpretation before they can answer to come to the unfortunate conclusion that there is no point in trying to answer a question, because by the time they can answer, the class has already moved on. This cycle is likely to result in feelings of frustration and to negatively affect students’ view of themselves as academically successful students.

Student strategies for dealing with this delay are likely to vary. While some choose to distance themselves from classroom discourse and restrict themselves to the practice of lurking rather than actively participating in interactions as full members of the classroom community of learners, others may develop their own coping strategies. La Bue (1998) reported that when a ninth grade Deaf student was asked what he did if he had a question or did not understand the teacher’s point, he replied that he might ask the teacher or the interpreter, but if he perceived that it wasn’t the right time, he would make a note to himself and ask later. Asked to clarify what he meant by the “right time,” he explained, “when the teacher stops talking or things in the class become more settled, for instance, when the students are working … or focused on something else. I wait until the teacher isn’t busy. But if the teacher is busy, then I’ll ask the interpreter” (ibid.: 112).

Several features of the above response are cause for alarm. Coupled with the fact that the researcher reported that the two Deaf youths using the interpreter never participated in large group discussions while data was being collected, this student’s remarks reflect his belief that being left out of class discussions is just a natural part of life. To think of an educational experience where a child or young adult feels that it is acceptable not to be included along with the rest of the students in what is supposedly a model of inclusion is intolerable. His strategy of writing himself a note not only demotes his standing to second-class, it places an additional cognitive demand and burden of responsibility on him that is not required of his peers, who can freely ask the teacher for clarification or elaboration when the guidance is relevant – without fear that the question will appear out of place or after the fact.

Contributing to the difficulty of this Deaf student’s need to jot down a note while the class is having a discussion is the fact that he must take his eyes off of the interpreter and miss part of the discussion. At the very least, he must divide his attention to compose a written note in English, perform the physical act of writing, and continue watching the interpreter while processing for meaning. Furthermore, if the interpretation itself was less than adequate, he must re-interpret the message he received as well. This type of cognitive multi-tasking would be challenging for even the most capable of adults. Indeed, graduates who are Deaf report that frustrations about timing have led them to talk to teachers after class rather than attempt to participate during class and that they participate “less frequently in mainstream classes” because of “concerns about clear communication, and self-consciousness,” especially because of the time delay associated with processing time. Students also reported that since it was difficult for the interpreter to keep up, often the hearing students were able to answer before the Deaf students were presented with the interpreted question (Kurz and Langer, 2004: 19).

In-the-field research on the moment-to-moment decisions of educational interpreters

Until very recently, only a few researchers have gone into the field to describe what actually happens in interpreter-mediated interactions. Although survey research provides significant
insight, it is limited to a finite set of responses. Rarely have practitioners been given an extended opportunity to elaborate on their perspectives on practice. Research specific to interpreting clearly demonstrates that skills beyond that of merely interpreting between two languages are required, but the field has made little progress in defining clearly what educational interpreters should be able to do and what sets of circumstances they are likely to encounter.

In one richly descriptive study, Smith (2013) videotaped and interviewed three interpreters working in fifth and sixth grade classrooms at three school sites to explore what interpreters do in the course of their work, and to illuminate the factors they consider when making moment-to-moment decisions.

Findings revealed five primary categories of what educational interpreters do during the course of their daily work. They are:

- Assess and respond to a constellation of contextual, situational, and human factors.
- Interpret and/or transliterate.
- Seek, obtain and capitalize on available resources.
- Interact with others.
- Perform aide duties and other tasks. Be useful or helpful as needed.

Although these broad strokes descriptions of what interpreters do may appear to be superficial and obvious, the true story is exceptionally complex. Through analyses of interview and video data, the fact that interpreters’ decisions and resulting actions are greatly influenced by unique constellations of multiple factors becomes exceedingly clear. Moreover, what interpreters do at any moment is significantly informed by their ongoing assessments of a myriad of factors. This study describes in detail how the work of educational interpreters is further complicated as they strive to optimize visual access, to facilitate the learning of language and content, and to cultivate opportunities for participation. Findings reveal that even highly qualified interpreters working in public schools are not always certain about how to achieve these critical goals (Smith, 2013).

Data indicate that even the most qualified interpreters may not be adequately prepared to swiftly and effectively meet the essential needs of Deaf and hard of hearing students in educational settings. Context-based research regarding authentic interpreter-mediated interactions in a variety of settings is a promising area of discovery. If the skills and knowledge needed for interpreters to work effectively can be identified along with the presumptions and beliefs underlying more and less effective decisions, the data can then inform curriculum development. Furthermore, it is possible that awareness of the skills and knowledge needed for interpreters to do their jobs effectively in educational settings could extend to teaching- and learning-based interactions in other contexts.

**Summary and conclusions: Implications for future research**

Taylor (2005) suggests that when hiring educational interpreters, administrators should assess an interpreter’s “skills, expertise, knowledge of the subject matter, and ability to suit the needs of the situation and the individual child. Interpreters must be competent to provide interpretation for the specific teachers and students for whom they are being hired” (ibid.: 179). Competency, however, as discussed above, depends on numerous factors, including the ability of the interpreter to adjust the interpretation according to the context, teaching and learning goals, and needs of the participants.

Since Deaf and hard of hearing students may not have had exposure to the same linguistic and cultural capital and funds of knowledge as their hearing classmates, Schick (2004) proposes that “appropriate scaffolding and guided participation for a hearing child at any point in development may not scaffold the deaf or hard of hearing child’s learning. The deaf or hard of
hearing child may need interaction and teaching that is more fine-tuned to his or her level of skills and understanding” (ibid.: 81). She suggests that training interpreters to become a working part of the educational team might be more reasonable than the “model of interpreting that was developed by interpreters who work in the adult community where the gold standard is to represent everything the teacher and classmates say” (ibid.: 81). Rather than basing decisions on the chronological age or academic grade level, each student’s language, cognitive, social and emotional readiness must be considered.

Scholars in the field of interpreter education have not reached consensus about the role of educational interpreters in consideration of the learning, language, and social–emotional needs of deaf and hard of hearing children in mainstream educational environments. Because of the impact that interpreters likely have on students’ language and school experiences, there is a pressing need for research on the work of educational interpreters, particularly in primary school settings or in all instances in which Deaf and hard of hearing students or immigrant students may not yet have developed a solid language foundation in any language.

Recent descriptive research provides insights and information about the challenges currently faced by interpreters in educational settings. There is a compelling need for further context-specific research in actual interpreter-mediated interactions and extensive collaborative efforts to determine how to better prepare interpreters to work effectively within complex educational contexts.

**Further reading**


Oliva, G. A. and Lyttle, L. R. (2014) *Turning the Tide: Making Life Better for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Schoolchildren*. Oliva and Lyttle present their findings regarding the educational experiences of Deaf and hard of hearing students and provide compelling stories that indicate these students are not truly included in “inclusive” school environments.

Smith, M. B. (2013). *More than Meets the Eye: Revealing the Complexities of an Interpreted Education*. Smith illuminates the five primary tasks performed by educational interpreters and explains how their moment-to-moment decisions are impacted by their endeavors to address Deaf students’ visual needs, promote language and learning, and cultivate opportunities for social and academic participation/inclusion.


**References**

Melissa B. Smith


Interpreting in education


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18
INTERPRETING FOR THE MASS MEDIA

Pedro Castillo

Introduction
Silvio Berlusconi and Nicolas Sarkozy hold a joint press conference after meeting to review the Schengen treaty (26th April 2011); Luis Urzúa, the last of the Chilean miners trapped in the San José mine, is about to come out of the mine and deliver a few words to the world (14th October 2010); Lionel Messi, Andrés Iniesta and Xavi Hernández await the FIFA World Player of the Year award in a global broadcast (10th January 2011); Rafael Correa, President of Ecuador, is ‘remote-interviewed’ by Julian Assange as part of an interview series on international affairs broadcast worldwide on the internet (May 2012); for a BBC World Service documentary a radio broadcaster shares a few days in the lives of small farmers and indigenous people in Paraguay affected by the production of biofuels (April 2010); Ewan McGregor and Charlie Boorman give an exclusive interview for the DVD extras of their Long Way Around series, which will be released as a multilingual DVD (2004); Canal Sur Televisión Andalucía covers the Granada Film Festival Cines del Sur for a one-hour special on the films presented at the festival, with interviews with the filmmakers, actors and other film-related professionals (every June, 2007–2011) …

All these examples of broadcasts share one aspect: language transfer from the language of the speaker must take place in order to broadcast it in the official language of the broadcasting institution¹ and to be understood by its audience; therefore, they qualify as interpreter-mediated broadcasts. However, the examples I have put forward above all differ in three essential aspects which are covered in this chapter: (1) how the interpreter is recruited and where they – or the interpreting team, or even the journalists themselves – carry out their job, (2) how the interpreter-mediated interaction is organized, prior to and during the event, and (3) how the interpreter-mediated event is ultimately broadcast.

In an increasingly globalized world, coverage of international news and events, as well as a wide range of forms of talk (press conferences, news interviews, multi-party debates, advice shows, audience participation programmes, etc.), have gained prominence as an alternative to the traditional narrative of news and/or opinion presentation (Heritage and Clayman 2010: 215). Furthermore, technological development has contributed a wide range of new interpreting output possibilities (see Table 18.1). The growth of interpreter-mediated mass media events and products over the last 40 years has run parallel to the aforementioned factors.
My aim in this chapter devoted to mass media interpreting is to go beyond interpreting modalities (see Chapters 5 and 6) and interpreter-centred approaches (focusing on the interpreter’s position, role and performance, as in Chapters 2, 3 and 27 of this volume; see also Kurz et al. 1996, Mason 2009) to cover a range of aspects which not only inform the way interpreters work within the media but which, most notably, also shape the events and conditions in which interpreting and/or some kind of spoken language transfer is required in broadcasting. Thus, my objective is to fill a gap which persists both in interpreter training and research by unveiling the production conditions under which interpreting takes place in mass media, highlighting the factors that make it possible for an interpreter-mediated event or product to be broadcast by a mass media institution. Anyone interested in mass media interpreting — whether at undergraduate, postgraduate or professional level — cannot nowadays ignore the fact that live coverage of international events and multilingual productions, such as documentaries, news reports and interviews, have become central to the practice of contemporary journalism and mass media broadcasting. This has been particularly true since the 1980s, when mass media turned ‘global’ even if still within national frameworks; such multilingualism in broadcasting has intensified along with the spread of the internet, thus influencing the how, what, and when of interpreting in the mass media.

Thus, my objective is to fill a gap which persists both in interpreter training and research by unveiling the production conditions under which interpreting takes place in mass media, highlighting the factors that make it possible for an interpreter-mediated event or product to be broadcast by a mass media institution. Anyone interested in mass media interpreting — whether at undergraduate, postgraduate or professional level — cannot nowadays ignore the fact that live coverage of international events and multilingual productions, such as documentaries, news reports and interviews, have become central to the practice of contemporary journalism and mass media broadcasting. This has been particularly true since the 1980s, when mass media turned ‘global’ even if still within national frameworks; such multilingualism in broadcasting has intensified along with the spread of the internet, thus influencing the how, what, and when of interpreting in the mass media.

Furthermore, it must be noted that not every mass media institution has the same approach to foreign languages, nor the same approach to and interest in covering events or producing broadcasts involving foreign languages. For example, CNN may have a rather English-centred approach to broadcasting, where English speakers (native or non-native) are preferred in the coverage of foreign events, broadcast interviews and debates etc.; the Franco-German network ARTE and other European channels rely much more on interpreting as a way to show linguistic diversity across Europe — and the rest of the world — by generally preferring that guests and interviewees speak in their mother tongue (cf. Moreau 1998 for the case of ARTE).

Table 18.1 Mass media interpreting descriptive framework of practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Live Broadcast</th>
<th>Recorded Broadcast / Podcast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mode of Interpreting</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mode of Interpreting</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Liaison</td>
<td>• Liaison as in Live Broadcast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Simultaneous</td>
<td>• Edited Liaison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mixed: Simultaneous/Liaison</td>
<td>• Simultaneous as in Live Broadcast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Edited Interpreter’s Simultaneous:</td>
<td>• Edited Interpreter’s Simultaneous:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pre-recorded Simultaneous: by the interpreter</td>
<td>• Pre-recorded Simultaneous: by the interpreter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Edited interpreter’s performance</td>
<td>• Edited interpreter’s performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Whether consecutive or simultaneous and re-recorded by radio broadcaster.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Location</strong></th>
<th><strong>Location</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Studio</td>
<td>• Studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Outdoors Studio</td>
<td>• Outdoors Studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• On Location</td>
<td>• On Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Editing Room</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Castillo and Comte (2010) and Castillo (2014). Developed as part of my PhD thesis (2014) and also presented at Languages and the Media, Berlin (2010), under the title *The role of the broadcaster in an interpreter-mediated radio interview.*
Therefore, the different linguistic approaches within mass media institutions across the globe are wide-ranging, diverse and complex: the medium’s agenda – or that of a particular programme – with regards to topics, production conventions, space-time constraints, financial aspects and so on, has an effect on which interpreter-mediated events are produced and broadcast. Consequently, we cannot look at mass media interpreting as a task for which we provide a uniform training for interpreters who are then simply hired to carry out their task. The intricacies of mass media interpreting are much more complex than that, and this is what I set out to (un)cover in this chapter.

Methodology and structure

To begin, I will present a mass media interpreting descriptive framework of practice, including a breakdown of locations and interpreting modalities where broadcast interpreter-mediated events/programmes take place, as well as how they are typically broadcast. Chief among the issues to be considered are quality (Kurz and Pöchhacker 1995; Kurz 2001; Straniero Sergio 2003), specific skills (Straniero Sergio 1999; Kurz 2002; Jääskeläinen 2003), the media interpreter’s profile (Kurz et al. 1996; Chiaro 2002) and ethics (Katan and Straniero Sergio 2001) (Table 18.1).

With this table in mind, we enter a critical review of events, programmes, formats and products where interpreting takes place in the mass media, with a special focus on production conditions and constraints, and which have an impact on the interpreting practice at all levels: pre-production, production, interpreter’s tasks, broadcasting and/or post-production.

Interpreting practices in the media

When is an interpreter required in the media? At what stage in the broadcast production are they brought in? What are the conditions (spatial, temporal, contractual) under which interpreters work in the media? What are the constraints influencing the way the interpreting is carried out? What are guidelines and expectations, if any, from the broadcasters and the broadcasting institutions? Who decides how interpreters’ renditions reach the audience, on the basis of which criteria and conventions? These are questions that anyone interested in media interpreting may ask and that should be of particular interest to broadcasters and interpreters.

It is important to emphasize that the examples I use are primarily drawn from public broadcasting institutions (particularly in Europe), where a great deal of multilingual broadcasting takes place. The recruitment and hiring of interpreters in these institutions may differ from those of private media institutions, which also reflects different approaches and policies towards language diversity and awareness across the media.

Broadcast news and events

Live and recorded broadcast events related to the coverage of news (e.g. 24 hour news channels, such as the BBC World Service and Spanish State TV’s Canal 24 Horas of RTVE), news reports (e.g. world news reports on ARTE) and worldwide broadcast events (e.g. the Tour de France) typically involve simultaneous remote interpreting (though not always), as well as interpreting team planning and organization. From a technical point of view, these types of broadcast involve multilateral connections between different media institutions.

Live news coverage: press statements and press conferences. Over the last 10–15 years, 24 hour news channels have proliferated due to the spread of digital TV, although they have been a common media institution in radio broadcasting. Generally, they devote a great deal of their
schedule to world news and international affairs and, hence, both live coverage and news reports depend on which news and events they decide to cover. Since these channels are permanently linked in to breaking news across the globe, foreign languages are often spoken in their coverage. Particularly in the non-English-speaking mass media institutions, interpreting is a frequently required task and/or service.

An example is RTVE’s Canal 24 Horas, which provides interpreting under a mixed system (personal communication with Daniel Sánchez and Carla Díaz, April 2011; Molina Vallecillo 2002) of in-house interpreters and freelance interpreters hired on-demand (Krone, personal communication, 2010; see also Moreau 1998). Based on the language needs of the channel and the international news and events covered on a daily basis, the in-house interpreter(s) speak(s) the most common foreign languages appearing on the channel (i.e. English and French) and freelance interpreters are called in when more interpreters who master these languages are needed (e.g. an event lasting for several hours, a multi-party debate, an unexpected event taking place outside the usual office hours) or when other foreign languages are spoken. Usually, the in-house interpreter, who coordinates the interpreting team, liaises with the news production section, which determines the schedule of when interpreter-mediated events will be broadcast on the channel. This schedule is provided with as much lead time as possible (between 1 and 2 weeks). However, the nature of international news and events dictates that unexpected breaking news will occur (e.g. the tsunami in Japan in 2011) and interpreters must be called at very short notice. This is one of the reasons for interpreting team managers to have an established list of freelance interpreters to rely on permanently if needed. In this way, those freelance interpreters also know that they can be required at any time and, therefore, media interpreting becomes part of their regular practice. As a result, they must pay constant attention to current affairs, this being one of the ‘genetic’ features of the media interpreter’s profile.

I will provide two examples of Canal 24 Horas interpreter-mediated events to illustrate this practice, the first being a press conference given by the former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and the former French president Nicolas Sarkozy after a private meeting. This is how the interpreting for this event was organized: (1) The press conference is announced and Canal 24 Horas decides to cover it live in its schedule. (2) The in-house interpreter (who interprets from French and Italian into Spanish) is given notice of the event and it becomes part of his working schedule for that day. (3) The interpreter prepares for the broadcast event as he considers necessary and goes into the RTVE remote interpreting booth, located in the central studios in Madrid, thirty minutes before the broadcast. (4) The interpreter phones the producer to verify that technical aspects of the broadcast have been tested (the signal coming from the Italian public TV, which appears on one screen, and the signal which is broadcast on Canal 24 Horas on another screen; input and output sound, and any other issue which may arise). (5) The producer and/or image/sound technicians may phone or come to the booth at any time before and during the broadcast to give the latest details and guidelines regarding the interpreting. In this particular case, the producer came in 10 minutes before the start of the press conference to tell the interpreter that the whole press conference would be broadcast live on Canal 24 Horas, with intermittent comments by the news host and one connection from TVE1, (the main channel of the RTVE group), that would briefly cover the press conference live during its news programme. Therefore, the interpreter was briefed to interpret the whole press conference, irrespective of what Canal 24 Horas would broadcast at any time, since the event was being recorded for later editions and eventual coverage in other news programmes. (6) The press conference starts, technical aspects are fine and the interpreter carries out the simultaneous interpreting, which is broadcast live on Canal 24 Horas and TVE1. Figure 18.1 illustrates this precise interpreter-mediated broadcast event.
Although events like this are presented as news, they can be pre-scheduled (usually 2 weeks to 24 hours before the event) and they are broadcast on a regular basis on Canal 24 Horas. Common examples of this scheduled practice include statements by EU leaders and stakeholders such as the director of the European Central Bank, the funeral of Yassir Arafat (2004), the latest British royal wedding (2011), or Barack Obama’s inauguration ceremonies (2009 and 2013).

A second example involves an unexpected event (becoming breaking news) which required interpreting at very short notice, involving close coordination between the news channel production and the interpreting section: the tsunami which devastated Fukushima (Japan) in 2011. Although the location and the interpreting modality would be the same as in the previous example (remote simultaneous interpreting from the RTVE interpreting booth), the origin and conditions of the broadcast event changed dramatically: (1) from the moment the tsunami occurs until the Japanese language interpreters are called in and confirmed, there may be a gap of a few hours which prevents the channel from broadcasting what could be the first reactions shown by the Japanese TV (the Japanese Prime Minister, people affected by the tsunami, etc.). (2) Hence, when the Japanese interpreters arrive, they may first be given a recording of the most recent statements/interviews to be interpreted and broadcast as soon as possible. (3) An assessment must be made of how much coverage will be devoted to the event and the subsequent language needs in terms of interpreting hours and staff. (4) The Japanese interpreting team is set up and standing by in the remote interpreting booth during the entire first 2–3 nights (due to the time difference between Spain and Japan) in the aftermath of the tsunami; they interpret into Spanish whenever Canal 24 Horas reports on the events in Japan and broadcasts live statements and/or interviews involving Japanese. With the increasing use of English as a lingua franca in global events, it is more and more common for stakeholders such as government representatives, experts and eye witnesses to speak English during media appearances. However, this can happen without previous announcement, which is why the interpreter usually has to be able to interpret from English into Spanish, in addition to their regular working languages.
The most immediate implications for the interpreters’ job and performance in this second example are two-fold: (1) the lack of time to prepare the topic thoroughly and (2) the seriousness and potentially huge repercussions of the statements/interviews being interpreted for the audience, which may have an impact on the interpreters’ level of stress, pressure and public accountability (see also Molina Vallecillo 2002, Kurz 2002).

Another mass media institution with a different approach to interpreting live news is the BBC, as exemplified in the coverage of the miners’ rescue in Chile in October 2010. English-speaking news channels such as the BBC News in the UK and CNN in the US rely heavily on English-speaking informants, witnesses and statements, reducing to a minimum their interpreting needs. However, there are times when all or part of the coverage takes place in a foreign language, or the channel decides to broadcast a statement or an interview with someone in their original language in order to provide authenticity (BBC 2013). When live coverage of this nature takes place, a freelance interpreter is hired by the BBC, whether on location (i.e. next to the journalist covering the events) or in the London or Manchester studios.

A short comment must be made on the BBC’s established practice of hiring interpreters whose mother tongue is the foreign language related to the event or speaker. The main reason given is that of authenticity (BBC 2013), although this practice has changed in recent years and a more open policy, based rather on the interpreter’s experience and quality, whether English native-speaker or not, seems to be in place.

The example of BBC coverage of the Chilean miners is illustrative. The story was followed worldwide, not only by the BBC, but arguably by all mass media in the world. For 69 days, there were permanent connections and coverage of the one-by-one release of the thirty-three miners, their respective speeches and, finally, the Chilean President Sebastián Piñera’s statements on location. BBC News hired an interpreter to render into English every broadcast statement or speech given in Spanish.

One of the immediate implications of this practice for the interpreter (which is replicated widely in news channels across the world) is that bits of that coverage may be re-used in later news broadcast bulletins, or shared by other channels belonging to the same media institution (such as BBC1, BBC Radio World Service, BBC Radio 4, etc.). Therefore, the interpreter must maintain quality in voice, content, structure and register, not only for the live broadcast but also as a recorded piece for later news programmes.

Pre-recorded news reports and events: News reports are the basic audiovisual (AV) piece in mass media news magazines, whether on radio, TV or internet media platforms (e.g. the BBC iPlayer or the ARTE news website). Short, edited news reports ranging from 30 seconds to longer feature reports of 4–5 minutes tend to include the journalist’s report, followed by stakeholders’ statements, interview extracts or witnesses’ accounts, then closing with the reporter’s wrap up. Although this structure may vary, most of the pieces dealing with international news (whether in politics, society, the economy, culture and arts, or sports) involve some kind of language transfer into the official language of the broadcasting media institution.

There are five recurrent ways in which foreign language AV pieces are interpreted, edited and broadcast as part of a news report:

- The journalist/reporter in charge of the news report speaks the foreign language and carries out the interpreting; they record it and edit it for voiceover in the broadcast piece.
- A fellow journalist or broadcaster located in the central studios who can speak the foreign language, receives the piece from the reporter, carries out the interpreting and edits it for voiceover.
An interpreter, whether on location or in the studio, in-house or freelance, is asked to interpret the foreign language piece for a later editing of their rendition (whether using their own rendition or a re-recording by a news broadcaster for voiceover).

An interpreter working from home or their office has voiceover recording software supplied by the media institution; they are sent the foreign language AV piece to be interpreted and recorded for voiceover, and send the finished piece back to the media institution to be broadcast (see Krone 2010).3

Whether it is a journalist, a commentator or an interpreter who provides the interpreting for the AV piece, the media institution decides to broadcast pieces in foreign languages with subtitles. The language transfer process may consist of directly translating and transcribing the original spoken text to the written text, which is then adapted for subtitling purposes.

The first two practices are typical of news reports made by correspondents with considerable experience in the language and culture where the report comes from; they become used to interpreting and producing voiceovers for these short pieces by themselves. A common example of this practice is found across European media institutions with news reports coming from the places where the main EU institutions are located, where mass media usually have permanent correspondents providing news reports and analyses.

The third and fourth practices tend to be in place for foreign languages not spoken by the journalists/reporters or, interpreters are hired in-house or on a freelance basis to interpret these pieces due to the frequent need for interpreting (cf. Moreau 1998, Krone 2010 and AIIC 2012).

A further example which is at the crossroads of live coverage, interviewing, news reporting and worldwide broadcast events can be found in the Tour de France, one of the longest running yearly sports competitions (in 2013, the Tour celebrated its 100th anniversary). This cycling event draws the attention of mass media and audiences all around the world. There are two aspects which make the Tour de France unique when it comes to media interpreting: it is held annually, therefore having much more media presence than the Olympic Games or the football World Cup, and the cyclists’ cultural and linguistic diversity leads to a wide range of stage winners and different jersey winners every day. Thus, different languages are spoken during the post-stage interviews with the cyclists (most commonly French, English, Italian, Spanish, German and Dutch). Because the event is held in France, its lingua franca is not English (unlike most sports or competitions these days), and the French approach to the post-stage interviews accommodates both the cyclists’ language preferences and the international media broadcasting the event live, taking the broadcast sent by French public TV. However, the diversity of media broadcasts, devices and formats in which an interpreter-mediated Tour de France post-race interview may take place is huge nowadays and offers very interesting practices for professionals, undergraduates and interpreting trainers alike.

Figure 18.2 above shows a stage winner’s (Andy Schleck, from Luxembourg) post-race interview, which is broadcast live by French TV and sent via multilateral broadcast to all TV channels with the broadcasting rights to show the event. The live broadcast of this interview by non-French speaking TV channels may take several approaches, typically a summarized simultaneous/consecutive interpretation by the journalist or expert-commentator, or a simultaneous interpretation by an interpreter.

One particularly interesting aspect is how online platforms, such as the official Tour de France website, have increasingly become multimedia platforms which, aware of their global audiences, offer them the opportunity to watch and listen to those interviews in different languages. The Tour de France website4 is full of interviews of this kind, where the user can access and observe the conventional practice followed in these AV pieces: a ‘dramatized’ voiceover in English,
German or French is played over the original cyclist’s utterance, thus providing not only access to the interview content, but also giving an illusion of immediacy. Whether the voiceover comes from a journalist, an interpreter or even a dubbing professional remains unknown. The aspect worth highlighting with this example is that in multimedia broadcasting, a single foreign language interview may lead to a wide range of broadcast outputs that accommodate the space-time conditions of the event (e.g. the TV commentator interprets the interview live) and the broadcast format (e.g. a voiceover in several languages for the online video).

**Worldwide broadcast events:** In contrast, there are worldwide broadcast events whose production and broadcasting are provided by the organizing and partner media institutions. Events of this type typically include (1) award ceremonies (e.g. the Academy Awards, the Grammy Awards, the Nobel Prize, or the FIFA Ballon d’Or), (2) contests (e.g. the Eurovision song contest, the Miss and Mister Universe contest) and (3) shows (e.g. the Olympic opening and closing ceremony). What these events have in common is that they are usually scripted and performed following a pre-established schedule. Furthermore, there is a growing trend of conducting them in English or, at most, following a consecutive bilingual format in English and French (Eurovision, Olympic ceremonies) or English plus the official language of the event’s host country (e.g. Chinese and English for the Olympic ceremonies in Beijing 2008). Whereas contests and shows do not usually rely on interpreting, since mass media across the world use their own journalists and commentators to broadcast the event, award ceremonies are a particular case of a mass media global broadcast production involving interpreting at various levels.

RTVE’s live broadcast of the FIFA Ballon d’Or award ceremony in 2011 is illustrative of the main broadcasting aspects of this type of interpreter-mediated broadcast event. Every year at its headquarters in Geneva, FIFA – in partnership with France Football magazine – holds the Ballon d’Or ceremony which gives the award for best footballer in the world (male and female), as well as other awards, such as best coach, best young player, and the best ‘world line-up’. Over the last decade, FIFA has decided to make a global media event out of this award ceremony and now the whole ceremony is broadcast by TV channels, radio stations and internet platforms across the globe. RTVE is one of them, and in 2011 the event drew the largest audience for its broadcast in Spain, since three FC Barcelona players were nominated for the best player award. It is not trivial to comment on these broad contextual factors, because they give an idea of the

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*Figure 18.2* Photograph from interview with Andy Schleck, Tour de France Stage 17 winner, 22nd July 2010. Source: www.letour.com
media institution’s expectations with regards to the event’s audience interest and eventual audience figures. A common trend can be found when it comes to the provision of interpreting in this type of events: the greater the repercussions of the event may be in terms of audience figures, the more consideration is given to language transfer issues.

The production stages and broadcasting practices with regards to interpreting are as follows: (1) an assessment of the ceremony’s schedule and original language(s) is made: the ceremony is conducted in English and the schedule of the ceremony has been sent to the media broadcasting it across the globe. Daniel Sánchez (personal communication 2011) comments that it is common practice now for RTVE to ask for those scripts, in order to facilitate both the journalists’/commentators’ and interpreters’ job. (2) A mixed system is established for the broadcast coverage of the event by RTVE, which broadcasts the ceremony via its sports channel, Teledeporte: two sport commentators lead the coverage of the event in Spanish and they carry out this task when the two masters of ceremonies (MoC) in the original event’s theatre address the on-site and remote audiences; as soon as a new award is going to be announced, they give the floor to the interpreters, located in RTVE central studio’s interpreting booths; they take over smoothly and interpret the words delivered by the MoCs but, most importantly, the core of their task is to interpret the award-winning players coming to the stage, in case they do not use Spanish. (3) A sound technician handles the floor-taking transitions from commentators to interpreters and vice versa, so that the broadcast reaches the audience smoothly and overlapping talk is avoided.

Although this is a very succinct account, the interpreter-mediated event can be best observed and learnt from by watching it live or online. This analysis of how interpreting is organized according to the broadcast conditions and the broadcasting institution’s interest shows what this type of broadcast event involves for the interpreter: firstly, interpreting is a core part of the broadcast event and it is managed collectively as part of a team effort involving producers, journalists, commentators, sound technicians and interpreters themselves. Secondly, although the structure and register of this type of ceremony tends to follow a well-established pattern that an interpreter can easily prepare for (as expected by both the media institution and the audience), there is the ‘trap’ of the unscripted speeches (by the winners, but also by those handing out the awards), which are the ones more eagerly anticipated by the audience. These constantly move from scripted to spontaneous talk are part and parcel of this kind of broadcast events and it is a skill that interpreters and interpreter trainers must be aware of, along with the crucial team work with their broadcasting colleagues (producers, commentators, sound technicians), prior to and during the broadcast event.

**Broadcast talk**

Talk, or talk-in-interaction, as I would prefer to call it for the purpose of reflecting the dialogical aspect of talk (Duranti and Goodwin 1992), is central to mass media broadcasting. In fact, interpreter-mediated talk-in-interaction is one of the most common practices in the wide field of mass media interpreting (cf. Baker 1997, Straniero Sergio 1999, 2003, Wadensjö 2000, 2008), ranging from live TV/radio interviews to press conferences and recorded interviews for broadcast production purposes (e.g. documentaries, magazines, features, etc.). Although research in broadcast dialogue interpreting (DI) is still scant compared to the frequency and visibility of this practice, it is a prolific interpreting field, both in terms of practices and data for research and training purposes. The following section therefore focuses on interpreter-mediated broadcasts where talk is at the core of the interaction between broadcasters, guests/interviewees, interpreters and the audience.

First of all, an examination of the public broadcasting arena created during interviews or other talk-in-interaction broadcasts is required so that interpreters are aware of where they are
interacting: interviewing has long been one of the basic journalistic tools for gathering information, providing debate and criticism and engaging with the audience via a dynamic, unscripted interaction. As Heritage and Clayman (2010: 215) argue, nowadays, this form of talk-in-interaction is an increasingly prevalent alternative to the traditional narrative form of news and/or opinion presentation. Interviewing as a form of unfolding broadcast talk-in-interaction is, therefore, central to the practice of contemporary journalism and broadcasting. In addition, Heritage and Clayman (2010) and Scannell (1986, 1988 and 1991), among others, conceptualized broadcast talk as a phenomenon that is worthy of analysis in its own right, rather than ‘the mere carrier of media “messages”’ (Hutchby 2006: 11).

But, how does it work when that broadcast talk is multilingual and interpreting is required? Depending on the broadcast event conditions, conventions and format, an interpreter-mediated interview or dialogue can take very different situational forms with regards to the communicative setting and the interpreting modality (see Table 18.1). I aim to present the three typical settings where interpreter-mediated broadcast talk-in-interaction takes place in mass media nowadays, and their implications for interpreting practices.

**Live and recorded broadcast interviews: TV and radio**

The first considerations to be taken into account in live and recorded broadcast interviews are: what is the communicative setting in which the interpreter will interact with the host, the interviewee and the production team? What are the technical provisions? Are there any organizational constraints that the interpreter should know before the interview starts? Different interpreting practices arise depending on the medium (radio, TV), the format (live, recorded, edited, etc.) and the media institution’s conventions, which are usually established through practice and experience.

A primary distinction between radio and TV live interviews relates to the interpreting modality: in a live TV interview – in a studio or on location – where the interviewer and the interviewee can be seen by the audience, the setting allows for simultaneous interpreting, with the interpreter usually located in a booth or the editing room, watching the primary participants on a screen (see Chapter 5 on simultaneous interpreting). Furthermore, it is generally acknowledged by mass media professionals and stakeholders that time in live TV is more precious and limited than in radio, where the centrality of talk and dialogue is actually one of its fingerprints. Hence, simultaneous interpreting becomes all the more fitting in TV broadcast and it has become the usual practice.

In live radio interviews, voice and sound are the only way to communicate with the audience. Hence, with interpreter-mediated live interviews, the radio host tends to feel more comfortable with consecutive/dialogue interpreting as a way of diminishing overlapping voices and helping the audience to distinguish who is talking when (Castillo, 2015 in press; see Chapter 6 on consecutive interpreting). However, the use of DI is time consuming and this is why many radio stations and programmes opt for editing their interpreter-mediated interviews and broadcast them edited, as if they were live, with the consecutive interpreting made to appear as if it were simultaneous. It is also common practice to edit out the interpreter’s renditions of questions by the interviewer into the foreign language of the broadcast, thus cutting on average 1/3 of the recorded original interview. The format of the broadcast interview also influences the interaction: a live interview, whether in news programmes, specialized radio programmes, or live entertainment talk shows, increases interactional work and requires agility in turn-taking, face work (Wadenjö 1998) and stress management. However, a recorded interview tends to decrease the speed and agility requirements, and allows for more off-the-record interaction between the interpreter and the primary interlocutors if needed.
There is a further crucial difference between radio and TV with regards to on-stage interaction and the audience: visual and non-verbal aspects of communication. The radio interpreter may use body language without face threatening fears with respect to the audience, as long as they know how to communicate simultaneously on these two levels of interaction (on-stage/off-stage) (see Castillo and Comte 2010).

A further issue is the physical placement of the active participants in the broadcast interaction: as in other settings where DI occurs (namely community or public service interpreting, see Chapter 14 in this volume), distance or remote interpreting, via telephone-studio or studio-to-studio connection (see Chapter 22), is bound to take place, particularly in radio interviews. In radio, depending on who hires the interpreter and/or previous negotiation between the radio station and those representing the interviewee (i.e. an event organizer, the interviewee’s manager, etc.), the interpreter may be with the interviewee in a remote location, or with the host in the studio communicating remotely with the guest. The influence of the physical setting on the interactional dynamics and, in turn, on the unfolding of the interview can lead to significant differences between face-to-face DI, distance DI and the location of the interpreter, either next to the interviewee or the interviewer. Table 18.2 offers an account of different organizational aspects and physical settings in interpreter-mediated live radio interviews (for further exemplification and discussion see Castillo 2015, in press).

When listening to interviews of this type, it can be observed how distance leads to negotiations and arrangements on who provides the interpreter, thus leading to a diversity of interpreters,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broadcast Interview:</th>
<th>Interview with Welsh filmmaker Peter Greenaway. 02/04/2010</th>
<th>Interview with Italian filmmaker Ermanno Olmi. 21/01/2013</th>
<th>Interview with Russian documentary filmmaker Victor Kossakovsky. 13/03/2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Participants:</td>
<td>– Javier Tolentino (host)</td>
<td>– Javier Tolentino (host)</td>
<td>– Javier Tolentino (host)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Peter Greenaway (guest)</td>
<td>– Valentin Gómez (interpreter)</td>
<td>– Kossakovsky (guest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Rafael Segovia (interpreter)</td>
<td>– Ermanno Olmi (guest)</td>
<td>– Unnamed (interpreter)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Olga Correas (expert in film and psychoanalysis)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Participants’ Location:</td>
<td>– Host: Radio 3 studios in Madrid</td>
<td>– Host and Interpreter: Radio 3 studios in Madrid.</td>
<td>– Host, Guest, Interpreter (plus other Spanish-speaking guests): Filmoteca Española (Spanish Filmhouse), Madrid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– Guest and Interpreter: RNE local studios in Cuenca</td>
<td>– Guest: his own house in Italy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreter Provider:</td>
<td>Festival de Música Religiosa de Cuenca (event organiser)</td>
<td>El Séptimo Vicio (non-professional interpreter)</td>
<td>DOCMA (documentary filmmaking association, event organiser)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Table adapted from my PhD thesis (Castillo 2015, in press). The data presented here form part of my PhD data.
which also has an impact on the broadcast interaction, as can be seen in interpreter-mediated live interviews on the programme El Séptimo Vicio (Figure 18.3), most notably with regard to turn-taking, sound management and the interpreting modality chosen by the interpreters based on the broadcast conditions.

Up to now, I have highlighted the communicative constraints that the media setting may have on the interaction between the active participants, including the interpreter. There are three basic aspects of mass media talk that an interpreter cannot ignore when interpreting a specific broadcast interview: the public broadcasting arena, the communicative ethos and broadcast framing (for more details on these concepts see Goffman 1974, Hutchby 2006, Scannell 1988, 1989, Castillo 2015, in press). In the same way that, for example, a politician may anticipate how an interview is going to work with Jeremy Paxman (Newsnight, BBC), for an interpreter who is briefed to interpret a live interview in a specific broadcast programme, it is essential to anticipate how the organization of talk-in-interaction is bound up with the public arena that is created – or framed – by the communicative ethos of the broadcasting institution/programme. In other words, given the following examples, it is highly advisable that interpreters ask themselves: what does it involve to interpret on Newsnight? What atmosphere is Ana Pastor (RTVE 2011) going to create when interviewing former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad? What relationship will Julian Assange try to build with Ecuador’s President Rafael Correa during a remote interpreter-mediated interview from Ecuador’s embassy where he was granted asylum?10 Thus, for the interpreter, preparing and anticipating the interview’s framing, arena and participants’ ethos is as important as preparing for the content of the interview.

The broadcast show El Hormiguero (Quatro, Spain)11 is an illustrative example of how the interpreter, who has been the same from the beginning of the programme, integrated into the ethos of the host, El Hormiguero’s public arena and the framing of the interviews, to such an extent that, nowadays, El Hormiguero’s interpreter is considered one more character within the programme. Her creativity and ability to establish a rapport between herself, the host and the guest has amazed the audience, and she even has a Facebook fan club where the public

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Figure 18.3 Radio 3’s El Séptimo Vicio on location studio at the Cines del Sur Festival 2010. Picture taken by Geraldine Comte.
comments on her interpreting. This mass media experience in El Hormiguero is evidence of the public visibility that the interpreter can reach in mass media.

**Multi-party debates**

The events that are of most relevance for interpreting under this category are electoral debates, which may be broadcast by foreign TV/radio stations due to the interest that they generate globally and locally. An illustrative example is that of the 2010 British General Election, broadcast by the BBC on 22nd April 2010, but also broadcast live by other media, such as RTVE’s Canal 24 Horas. Following the same organizational patterns commented on before with regards to the hiring of the interpreters at RTVE and their job being carried out remotely from the RTVE studio’s interpreting booth, the key question here was: who interprets whom? As Daniel Sánchez (personal communication 2011) commented, the first consideration which arose in the interpreting team was the assignment of a candidate (Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat), the host and the audience participation to each interpreter. This allowed for smoother and more comfortable reception of the interpreted utterances by the audience (Straniero Sergio 1999). However, the nature of this electoral debate entailed several challenges for the interpreters: (1) turn-taking for the interpreters, under a speech-exchange system (Sacks et al. 1974) characterized by overlapping talk, fast and/or interrupting turn-taking transitions; (2) the remote location of the primary participants (London), where the interpreters cannot have any interactional influence, even off-air; (3) a broadcast event which originally is for national audiences in the UK rather than a foreign audience, meaning that the speakers were not aware of issues such as speed, prosody and pauses, which they might take into account if they knew their utterances depended on interpreters to reach their audience. Sánchez and Díaz (personal communication 2011) stress that the setting becomes even more complex when there are fewer interpreters than primary participants in this type of event, since the interpreters must use prosody and pauses to make clear to the audience who is talking when. This is particularly true when the delay in the simultaneous interpreting increases at some point during the speech exchange.

**Press conferences**

Whether it is a political summit, a world sports event or a film première, press conferences are a common venue for interpreters (cf. Straniero Sergio 2003). The setting tends to be quite similar in every press conference: a press room with the speaker(s), usually accompanied by the press officer or the press conference coordinator/chair, and the interpreter, in case there are no facilities providing for simultaneous interpreting in the press room, all facing the journalists and cameras and being filmed and audio recorded (see Figure 18.4 below).

Press conferences as a situated form of talk are also highly institutionalized: the speaker may be introduced by the press officer/coordinate, who, in the case of interpreter-mediated press conferences and upon the interpreter’s request, may give coordination guidelines to the journalists with regards to the interpreting (order of questions, allowing for the interpreting to be carried out before asking a new question, sound requests, etc.); then, the speaker makes an initial statement or leaves the journalists to start asking questions until the press conference is brought to an end. However, the apparent structural homogeneity (with regards to the setting and the talk-in-interaction) does not explain all the intricacies and challenges of this communicative event as far as interpreting is concerned: first of all it is important to emphasize that the interpreters we see in press conferences do not all reach that setting via the same path. Table 18.3 aims to offer an account of this diversity, with actual broadcast examples.
Secondly, press conferences are multimedia and multimodal settings with complex implications for the interpreter: regardless of who hires the interpreter, the notion of loyalty to the client is blurred and different interests must be juggled by the interpreter. For example, does the interpreter know if there are media covering the press conference live and recording their voice? This aspect would have implications for the use of first or third person when

![Figure 18.4 Press conference, Cines del Sur, 2010. Picture taken by Geraldine Comte.](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQm9RJfoVoA)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Press Conference</th>
<th>Football (post-match)</th>
<th>Granada Cines del Sur Film Festival</th>
<th>Mediterranean Olympic Games (Almería-Spain)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>May 2006</td>
<td>12/06/2010</td>
<td>June 2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee</td>
<td>Alberto Malessani (Panatinaikos FC Coach)</td>
<td>Fatemeh Motamedarya (Iranian Actress)</td>
<td>Several: organizers, sportspersons, team coaches, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages</td>
<td>Italian–Greek</td>
<td>Farsi–Spanish</td>
<td>Several, depending on the interviewees (mainly: Spanish, English, French, Arabic, Italian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting Modality</td>
<td>Consecutive/Dialogue</td>
<td>Consecutive/Dialogue</td>
<td>Consecutive / Simultaneous (depending on the press room facilities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreter Provider</td>
<td>Panatinaikos FC</td>
<td>Film Festival</td>
<td>Local Organizing Committee (Almería)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible at</td>
<td><a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQm9RJfoVoA">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQm9RJfoVoA</a></td>
<td>Castillo and Comte 2011 (only partially)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18.3 Who hires the interpreter in press conferences?
interpreting. Does the interpreter explain which kind of media outlet the journalist asking the question comes from or do they leave it to the speaker to ask for clarification? Should the interpreter help the press officer in coordinating question-answer turns?

Furthermore, the visibility of the event may have large media repercussions for all the active participants, including the interpreter, particularly if things get out of hand as in the Alberto Malessani press conference (see link in Table 18.3). Therefore, face work and stress management gain special emphasis in this setting (see also Jiménez Serrano 2011).

When it comes to the interaction itself, there are aspects that are of specific relevance in interpreter-mediated press conferences: turn-taking and microphone coordination, particularly if consecutive interpreting takes place and even more in the (unlikely) absence of a press officer/ordinator; multiple media outputs (radio, TV, written press, general and specialized media, online media, etc.); also, unexpected post-press conference interviews that arise due to particular interest of journalists/media in what the speakers(s) said during the press conference. In all of these situations, close coordination between the interpreter and the press officer and/or protocol officer is crucial prior to, during and after the press conference. As an example of a clash of interests determining what happens after a press conference, imagine that after Fatemeh Motamedarya’s film festival press conference, Canal Sur TV asks for an exclusive interview to be interpreted for its Cines del Sur special programme to take place just after the press conference. However, the film festival has organized a lunch with the actress just after the press conference, to which the interpreter (hired by the film festival) is asked to accompany her. The festival press officer is interested in having her appear on Canal Sur TV because of the impact for the festival. What does this succession of conflicting interests lead to? Whatever the outcome of that situation was (in fact, the interview with Canal Sur took place after lunch), what is interesting is that all these negotiations must take place, inevitably with the presence (and, why not, the opinion) of the interpreter. In fact, the interpreter becomes crucial in that negotiation process, not only to enable communication with the Farsi-speaking actress, but also notably to be part of that negotiation, which involves the interpreter assignment.

**Interpreting talk-in-interaction for broadcast production purposes**

The previous example of the unplanned interview for Canal Sur special programme takes us to the final category of interpreter-mediated events focusing on broadcast talk-in-interaction: interviews which are not broadcast live but which are conducted to be edited and broadcast as part of a larger media product, such as a specialized programme, a documentary or a feature within a programme. A common characteristic of these interviews is that the interpreter works on location with the journalist, the interviewee and the rest of the production crew (i.e. producer, executive producer, assistants, camera operators, sound operators, etc.). A second common feature is that the amount of interpreter-mediated talk-in-interaction which actually takes place before and after the recording of the interview is greater and it takes more time than the actual interview. Furthermore, the interpreter-mediated communication is edited at the discretion of the director/producer/journalist, also taking into account their agenda and the schedule of what they want to include in the final media product. Therefore, while the actual recorded interpreter-mediated interview might last for 15–20 minutes, only 30 seconds might be included in the final piece. This places the interpreter in a position where they do not know how their utterances will be broadcast; however, as shown in the examples in Table 18.3, there is the certainty that the final broadcast of interpreter-mediated extracts is the product of a collaborative effort of the entire production crew, including the interpreter.

This type of interpreter-mediated mass media event includes documentaries, whether for TV, cinema, radio or the web. I will use the example of BBC Radio 4’s *File on 4*, which follows
procedures and practices that are common within this landmark media institution: the BBC has institutionalized (via convention, not written policies) the position of fixer (Murrell 2010). As G. N. (a BBC4 journalist) explains (personal communication, 2011), the fixer is a professional whose role and position go beyond language transfer. Coordination tasks and even accompanying the interviewee/guest/journalist are part of the fixer’s agenda prior to and after the actual interview (see Chapter 1 for a definition of fixer). The fixer in this kind of broadcast production may have a huge impact on the final product, since there are multiple decisions which may be left to their discretion, e.g. the places and communities that are visited, the experts and witnesses to be interviewed, requests for filming/interviewing permissions, contact with authorities and so on. In sum, the fixer is a job in itself, which includes interpreting (not even in all cases, as sometimes journalists prefer to carry out the interpreting by themselves) but only as one more task of a multi-faceted job.

Mass media products

Mass media products are initially made for a specific target language audience but at some point after having been broadcast they cross their monolingual frontier and are exported or broadcast for larger audiences which may not necessarily speak the source language. Examples of these products are documentaries which are bought by foreign TV stations or released on DVD or similar formats. In addition to the already scripted and subtitled main documentary, they may include special features, such as an interview with the director. Here, it is not uncommon for the production company to follow the broadcasting conventions explained in previous sections and require an interpreter to render the words into another language for either a recording of the interpreter’s voiceover, re-recording by a voiceover professional or the journalist himself or herself, or subtitling. In these cases, the emphasis is on an interpretation which dramatizes the original utterances. Indeed, this practice has become a convention in this kind of products, probably also influenced by the impact of dubbing in the cultures and audiences which these media products aim to reach.

The media interpreter: a specific profile at a crossroads between broadcaster, coordinator and fixer

Throughout this chapter, I have tried to show the diverse landscape of media interpreting, in terms of the hiring of interpreters by media institutions or event organizers who expect their event to have wide media coverage. There are different interactional dynamics and arrangements which impact on the interpreter’s preparation for the event, as well as their access to different stakeholders (broadcasters, guests, producers, etc.); furthermore, this diversity applies to settings and technical provisions, as seen in the different tables and lists of common practices included in this chapter; last but not least, there is also a great diversity of events, primary participants to be interpreted, audiences and topics to which interpreters must adapt like chameleons, while at the same time leaving their mark in the same way as journalists and broadcasters do. It is not surprising, therefore, that media interpreters and literature on the field all agree on the specific profile of the media interpreter.

Before providing a summary of the key issues for media interpreters, I would like to present the views of media stakeholders with years of experience working with interpreters, who were interviewed for my Heriot-Watt University research project, *Interpreting in the Media: Liaison Interpreting in Radio and TV settings* (2010–2012) (see Castillo and Comte 2011).
Technical considerations

We use both simultaneous and consecutive interpretation. I personally like simultaneous best. I think it’s more efficient for making the most of the interpreter’s work. Simultaneous translation, first of all, allows for more nuance. ... And also, technically, it solves a lot of problems: we don’t have to find a voice for the translation that was recorded earlier. But it can’t always be done.

(Pedro Romacho, RTVA editor/journalist)

Media stakeholders have their own conventions and preferences with regards to how an interpreter-mediated event could be carried out. These preferences may vary and, quite often, have to be adapted to the constraints of the moment. Hence, an assessment of the technical constraints and broadcasting conditions by the whole broadcasting team (including the interpreter) should always be sought.

The interpreter as a broadcaster

In television, the interpretation should be like the camerawork or the editing: a transparent structure, through which viewers see what we are trying to say, but without stopping to see the mechanisms that make the story comprehensible to them. It’s more the final result, the whole, what people perceive and what they criticize or praise, what they like or don’t like.

(Eladio Mateos Miera, RTVA editor/journalist; press officer of Cines del Sur I and II)

This statement illustrates how the interpreter is expected to be aware of broadcasting conventions and style according to the needs of the media project, product or event. Broadcasters, as communication professionals, are well aware of the fact that the interpreter is another communication professional who has the same aims of reaching a vast audience.

The interpreter’s input in the broadcast production team: creativity

[commenting on a multilingual broadcast production] ... there are certain guidelines, but letting each category, the editor, the cameraman, the sound technician, letting each one contribute, however they can, with their creativity.

(Antonio Alarcón, RTVA programme director)

Although practices vary across different mass media, this statement shows that when there is language awareness and the production crew is understood as an ensemble of professionals who can offer their skilled input, interpreting is an intrinsic part of the media communities of practice.

The media interpreting landscape I have presented throughout this chapter aims at showing that there is not a golden rule or one-size-fits-all approach to protocols, guidelines and technical provisions in media interpreting. Nevertheless, if language awareness is part of the broadcasting institution and/or production team, the chances are much higher that a multilingual broadcast event will be professionally and thoughtfully produced and broadcast to reach the target audience efficiently, comfortably and smoothly.

Socio-economic considerations: a changing media landscape

The views put forward above, claiming that interpreting is a core part of multilingual mass media
productions/projects/events, seem to be at odds with the huge cuts in public mass media productions involving interpreting, as a consequence of the financial crisis and the slashing of public services. However professional experience and research leads me to argue in favour of mass media production frameworks where interpreting and interpreters are an intrinsic part of the production. Accordingly, interpreters should be hired in-house, in partnership with the organizers of covered events or on a freelance basis, following a series of criteria based on the needs of broadcast interpreting. It should be noted that this is standard procedure in public institutions such as the EU and the UN, as well as other grass-roots or activist organizations (see Chapter 2 in this volume, and Boéri 2012), in contrast to the growing trend elsewhere of outsourcing interpreting services. Outsourcing inevitably leads to the exclusion of interpreting from initial production concerns, as well as worsening the interpreters’ working conditions (as evidenced in other fields of interpreting, such as community interpreting, see Chapter 14 in this volume and De Pedro Ricoï et al. 2009).

Further developments

Training and practice

The diversity of interpreting settings and practices covered in this chapter shows that interpreting students and practitioners can learn a great deal from real interpreter-mediated broadcast data, either by practising with actual interpreter-mediated pieces\textsuperscript{15} or by critically watching/listening to interpreter-mediated broadcast events and reflecting on them, both individually and in class with an instructor.

Research avenues

A wide field of new research pathways is still open in mass media interpreting, particularly with regards to the application of research in training and practice. It must be acknowledged that relevant research in mass media interpreting has not fully permeated through interpreting training and that a closer relationship between academic and media institutions is needed. In addition to innovative programmes and workshops (see Conferences and Workshops, below), there have been encouraging research-based initiatives worth highlighting, such as ARTE’s occasional training programmes\textsuperscript{16} and its active presence in media translating and interpreting conferences (e.g. Krone 2010, 2012); research projects aiming at studying interactional aspects of media interpreting (see Straniero Sergio 1999; Katan and Straniero Sergio 2001; Mack 2002), studies on the position of the media interpreter (along the lines of Chiaro 2002; Wadensjö 2000, 2008; Baker 1997; Kurz et al. 1996) and the constraints and expectations of mass media settings with regards to interpreting (e.g. Kurz 1990, 2001, 2002; Kurz and Pöchhacker 1995; Molina Vallecillo 2002; Straniero Sergio 2003; Jiménez Serrano 2011).

Interpreting in particular programmes or settings (along the lines of Jääskeläinen 2003; Castillo 2015, in press) following conversational and ethnographic research could well inform training in different media cultures and countries. Furthermore, there is considerable scope for further research on conversational and discursive practices, as well as the effects of production constraints, which are all the more urgent if we consider new media. This new research might inform practice and training so that the quality and quantity of interpreter-mediated events are increased in the coming years, in spite of the negative currents ahead (particularly with regards to budgets and public service coverage), even in well-established mass media across the globe.
Conferences and workshops

The following list includes a series of international conferences and workshops where mass media interpreting is present either as part of the event or as the core of it, with the purpose of showing research, training and practice related environments for interpreting students, researchers and broadcasters alike. Although most of the events are held regularly, some of them may have been held as a one-off event; nevertheless, I consider them to be key to making progress and creating awareness about the field:

- Languages and the Media (Berlin – biannual):
  http://www.languages-media.com/
- Media for All (rotating venues – biannual):
  http://www.mediaforall.eu/
- ITI (occasional media interpreting related symposium):
- ARTE (occasional media interpreting related workshops):
  http://aiic.net/page/3851/exploring-media-interpreting/lang/1
  http://aiic.net/page/3127/voice-coaching-for-interpreters/lang/1

Notes

1 Since emphasis is placed on the communicative setting, the term media or broadcasting “institution” is preferred over “company”, as a place where talk-in-interaction and discourse are at the interface between the public and private domains of life, under specific context-based constraints (cf. Heritage and Clayman 2010; Hutchby 2006).
Interpreting for the mass media

14 Original answers were given in Spanish. English translation provided by Alexis Weninger, as in Castillo and Comte (2011).
15 This approach is in line with Sandrelli and de Manuel Jerez (2007), as well as teaching projects such as de Manuel Jerez et al. (2004).
16 See http://aiic.net/page/1051.

Further reading

Jiménez Serrano, O. (2011) Backstage conditions and interpreter’s performance in live television interpreting: quality, visibility and exposure. In: The Interpreters’ Newsletter 16: 115–136. With a comprehensive overview of previous research on media interpreting, the author points out the need for pursuing a deeper knowledge of the conditions behind the scenes of live TV interpreting, with the aim of accounting for key issues such as quality and stress parameters when carrying out this specific task.

Written at a time when TV had much larger audiences and social impact, this work highlights key aspects of live TV interpreting, namely immediacy, exposure, quality and stress. Kurz’s research on media interpreting is as prominent as it is extensive (see references).

This article evidences the complexities of transnational and multilingual broadcasting, highlighting production issues which have a direct impact on the organization of interpreting for broadcasting purposes.

A pioneering article focusing on the interactional aspects of media interpreting, using a corpus of actual interpreter-mediated interviews on Italian television.

The role and position of the interpreter is a permanent concern for media producers and journalists, as well as for interpreters themselves. This article offers a thorough analysis and discussion on how the interpreter and the interpreter-mediated interaction are conceptualized through practice in broadcast interviews.

References


Interpreting for the mass media


This chapter attempts to describe the complex roles of interpreters working in conflict zones, the challenges they face in terms of physical security and vicarious trauma, and how those who make use of interpreting services in the field, whether they are humanitarian actors or military personnel, expect services that go beyond facilitating conversations, to include advising military, civilian and international employers about the history, culture, and society of the area, and thus also acting as fixers and liaisons.

There is a growing understanding of the interpreter as more than a technical tool to overcome language barriers: the interpreter as a co-constructor of meaning. This role impacts the ethics of the interaction and our ability to make claims to knowledge based upon it. The ideal interpreter is one that is accurate, faithful to the original, impartial with a high degree of professional integrity and clear: accurate in terms of rendering all the information that has been provided in the original, faithful in terms of rendering the meaning intended by the original speaker, impartial in terms of not siding with any parties engaged in an interpreted scenario and clear in terms of the level of professional skill (see Chapter 20 on ethics).

In the field in humanitarian, conflict and post-conflict contexts, however, many factors complicate the achievability of this ideal. Local interpreters are hardly ever trained to carry out their tasks in a professional manner, although many have acquired good interpreting skills through experience; that, however, does not automatically make them professionals, as one would expect professionals to act with integrity, accountability, ethical behavior and “overall excellence”. Users of field interpreters usually lack understanding of the interpreting profession, and since they are working largely with untrained interpreters, they do not perceive interpreters, and particularly locally recruited interpreters, as professionals.

The concepts of neutrality and impartiality feature prominently among core humanitarian principles, and they are intended to guide the activities of humanitarian agencies. They are based on the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations in Disaster Relief, adopted in 1993 (ICRC 1993) and signed by 492 institutions, and they inform our understanding of an ideal interpretation. However, they are underpinned by an assumption of the non-embeddedness of the field interpreter, who is in fact positioned within the social, political, economic and cultural contexts.
in which conflict zone interpretation takes place. As such, neutrality is understood to mean that humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature. Impartiality is defined as the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of nationality, race, gender, religious belief, class or political opinions (OCHA 2010). Humanitarian actors engaging with local populations need to respect humanitarian principles, but also to take into account the positionality of the interpreters through whom they interact with the local population. The presence of a local interpreter may also influence the way parties interact in the field (Mancini-Grieffoli and Picot 2004:132). Language barriers have become a major obstacle to humanitarian relief at many levels, especially as expectations of engagement of humanitarian staff with local communities grow. In fact, it has become fashionable to talk about remote management of operations in high-risk environments where national partners deliver while internationals manage from afar. As is stated in the Principles of Partnership (Global Humanitarian Platform 2007), “whenever possible, humanitarian organizations should strive to make [local partners] an integral part in emergency response. Language and cultural barriers must be overcome.” A coherent approach to delivery of humanitarian aid in multilingual and multicultural environments is thus needed. The most appropriate, sustainable and lasting solutions are found when humanitarian actors engage not only with those who speak the language of aid, most often English, but with all members of the societies in conflict, irrespective of their ability to understand or speak it (Anderson, Brown and Jean 2012).

Defining interpreting in conflict zones

With interpreting in conflict zones emerging as a new area of specialization in research and practice, it is important to define the notion of “conflict”. Conflict can escalate from mere differences to contradictions, polarization, violence and war, and then can de-escalate following a ceasefire designed to pave the way to an agreement, normalization and reconciliation. War, then, is not the only form of conflict and not every conflict assumes the scale of a full-blown war. Conflict resolution and subsequent conflict transformation require negotiation or mediation and the ability of suppressed or marginalized individuals or groups to articulate their interests (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall 2011). Table 19.1 below illustrates how conflict can escalate from mere differences of opinion to full-blown war and how de-escalation ultimately can lead to reconciliation.

Analyzing the different types of responses listed in the right-hand column, and proceeding on the assumption that actors and local populations do not share the same language, the scope of what constitutes “interpreting in conflict zones” can be more clearly defined to include any of the above-indicated response areas. The majority of responses will require interaction between the local population and international and/or humanitarian actors. However, there are significant differences between the various contexts that emerge from these responses and which define the specifics of the interpreters’ work.

Defining and protecting the interpreter

Since the wars in Iraq and in Afghanistan, the media have paid much greater attention to the fate of interpreters working in conflict zones. The embeddedness of conflict zone interpreters, their lack of professional identity and training, and the absence of a professionally well-defined group, all contribute to these interpreters not yet being clearly and uniformly categorized for the purpose of protection. In fact, many of them have sought asylum abroad in order to escape retribution by members of their own communities or states who perceive them as traitors. By examining the
concept of protection, we can begin to disentangle the legal complexity of the status of conflict zone interpreters.

Protection goes beyond physical protection in terms of being issued protective clothing. To meet the immediate and long-term needs of conflict zone interpreters, the concept of protection requires careful definition; no other type of interpreter is exposed to the same dangerous work environment as the conflict zone interpreter. The notion of “protection” can assume different meanings due to the fact that both humanitarian interpreters and military linguists work in contexts that are covered by the Responsibility to Protect, also known as R2P (United Nations
Security Council Resolution S/RES/1674, 2006), a set of principles that aim to prevent four different types of crimes: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. International Humanitarian Law (IHL), which does apply in conflict zones, covers two key areas: protection and assistance to those affected by the hostilities, and regulation of the means and methods of warfare. The sources of IHL are the same as those for international law in general, and include the Hague Convention (1907), which sets out restrictions on the means and methods of warfare, and the four Geneva Conventions (1949), which provide protection to certain categories of vulnerable persons, such as the wounded and sick in armed forces in the field; the wounded, sick and shipwrecked members of armed forces at sea; prisoners of war; and protected civilians. The Fourth Geneva Convention is particularly relevant to humanitarian protection and assistance. The four Geneva Conventions have achieved universal applicability as they have been universally ratified. The Additional Protocols, however, have yet to achieve near-universal acceptance. For example, the United States and several other significant military powers (including Iran, Israel, India and Pakistan) are currently not parties to the protocols.

While, international humanitarian law applies only to situations of armed conflict, it applies to all actors in an armed conflict. The Fourth Geneva Convention focuses on the civilian population. The two additional protocols adopted in 1977 extend and strengthen civilian protection in international and non-international armed conflict, for example by introducing the prohibition of direct attacks against civilians. A “civilian” is defined as “any person not belonging to the armed forces”, including non-nationals and refugees (Additional Protocol I, Art 50(1)). By way of example, for aid agencies that remain in Afghanistan, military strategies have severely eroded the distinction between combatants and civilian aid actors in the eyes of both insurgents and ordinary Afghans, forcing aid agencies to begin civil-military dialogue anew with Afghan security forces, a process that requires regular use of interpreters. The capacity and willingness of the Afghan security forces to engage in this dialogue remain unclear, and aid agencies will have to identify new strategies and new means of engaging to ensure that they are able to operate safely and to improve protection for the populations they aim to assist (Jackson and Haysom 2013).

The Conflict Zone Field Guide (2012) drafted by the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) uses the term ‘protection’ in a somewhat less transparent way: “You have a right to protection both during and after the assignment. If necessary, this should include your family as well. You should be provided with protective clothing and equipment, but not arms.” “Protection” here could either be understood to relate to the concept of protection as enshrined in IHL, or more concretely as physical protection through protective clothing. Since AIIC’s guide relates specifically to civilian interpreters, whether embedded in the military or not, IHL would seem to apply and the AIIC Guide might then be seen as a document that elaborates on IHL principles for a specific segment of the civilian population, although it makes no explicit reference to IHL. Since actors in conflict zones, especially humanitarian actors, work within the framework of IHL, it would be important to amend the AIIC Guide and add specific references to applicable international law and international humanitarian law. That way, everyone in the field could operate within the same legal framework.

The employment of locals by the international military force creates intercultural encounters not only between “internationals” and “locals” but, simultaneously, between civilians and the military. The categories are arguably under most strain when local interpreters travel with the force on core peace-keeping tasks outside the base (Baker 2010). Baker (ibid.) illustrates this by way of the example of an RAF officer who had been a civil affairs officer in central Bosnia in 1999, and who distinguished between uniform and equipment when asked about interpreters’ kit. He indicated that the interpreters would not have equipment “because … it’s not their job to soldier”, though they would get a camouflage outfit from the stores “just to show that in fact
they were working on the UK … side”. Clearly, being employed by the military does not automatically make the interpreter a member of the military, nor does it confer the same type of protection on the interpreter as that enjoyed by a member of the army. Still, it sets the interpreters apart from the civilian populations, conferring certain privileges on them, such as being evacuated ahead of any other member of the civilian population. Baker (2010) indicates that the distinction between military and civilian was at its most porous during the war in Yugoslavia where interpreters were concerned. According to her, cleaners, laborers, mechanics, laundresses and kitchen hands remained on the bounded space of the base performing various support functions. Interpreters, however, were untrained persons of a different nationality who were supposed to be on the soldiers’ side during military tasks in a foreign, potentially hostile, environment beyond the gates of the compound. Pre-deployment training emphasized that, in dangerous situations, soldiers should look after interpreters before themselves. In another example, which exemplifies the tension around the interpreter’s status, Baker (2010) relates the case of a British bomb disposal officer who indicates that working with local staff was “like treating another fellow soldier”, but that limitations were imposed because “they are unarmed” and might lack a soldier’s “degree of training and situational awareness”.

Bartolini (2009) emphasizes that interpreters are to be recognized as enjoying specific protection within the scope of IHL since, as far as the conduct of hostilities is concerned, they can be classified as civilians both in international and non-international armed conflicts and are thus to be protected from the effects of said hostilities. Furthermore, he argues that it would seem hard to claim that the activities they engage in would involve a loss of immunity against direct attack. Interpreters working in conflict zones can be considered to be covered by IHL and international law, as otherwise these interpreters would be stranded in a legal vacuum and their protection would consequently be compromised. That said, a distinction needs to be made here between interpreters working in situations of conflict and those working in post-conflict situations. The latter can drag on for a very long time if peace-building processes are complex and subject to relapse into full-blown conflict. During peace-building, international organizations and non-governmental organizations are involved in reconstruction. This usually occurs at a time when hostilities have ended and IHL no longer applies to the status of interpreters acting in these zones. However, other international law provisions can be invoked. This underscores the importance of a more fine-grained categorization of interpreters working in conflict and post-conflict zones, as was already argued in relation to the distinctions suggested in Table 19.1 above, so that conflict zone interpreters enjoy the rights conferred on them as members of a specific category of civilians entitled to protection.

Responsibility for protecting the interpreter

Participants in a roundtable organized in 2011 (HPG and ICRC 2011) by the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) concluded that the primary responsibility for the protection of civilians clearly lies with states – both on their own territory and in their military operations in other contexts. The discussion focused on the commonalities and differences in how international humanitarian and military actors understand and put into practice the concept of protection of civilians. The discussion also examined the specific roles and responsibilities that each have in supporting enhanced protection of civilian populations (ibid.). The responsibility of the state identified by HPG and ICRC also backs up claims made to governments involved in the Iraq war that they should care for Iraqi interpreters both during and after the war. The HPG and ICRC (ibid.) document, however, also points to international organizations such as the ICRC,
which are legally mandated by member states, or specialized UN entities such as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), which are mandated by the UN General Assembly, as having an important role in providing protection. These mandates may be bound in time and subject to renewal. Furthermore, the ICRC Interpretive Guide on Direct Participation regarding the Geneva Conventions defines private contractors and civilian employees, the category we may consider most appropriate for locally recruited interpreters, as follows: “Private contractors and employees of a party to an armed conflict who are civilians are entitled to protection against direct attack unless and for such time as they take a direct part in hostilities. Their activities or location may, however, expose them to an increased risk of incidental death or injury even if they do not take a direct part in hostilities” (ICRC 2008:5). Eligibility guidelines issued by UNHCR (UNHCR 2009) recognize the serious threat to civilians working with the Multi-National Forces (MNF-I) and state that “The risk is particularly high for persons working as interpreters for the MNF-I given their exposure and possible involvement in military activities, e.g. arrests, raids or interrogation of insurgent or militia members” (UNHCR 2009:168). The *Montreux Document on Pertinent International Legal Obligations and Good Practices for States Related to Operations of Private Military and Security Companies During Armed Conflict* (ICRC/FDFA 2009) provides a comprehensive set of recommendations relating to practices of private military and security companies, such as verifying private contractors’ track records, examining procedures used to vet staff, appropriate prosecution when breaches of law occur, and ensuring compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law by providing staff training.

Interpreters can become employees of international organizations operating in a conflict zone and could thus benefit from the privileges usually afforded to international staff or national staff of these organizations. This could be provided under the United Nations SOFAs (Status-of-forces agreements—SOFA, UN Doc. A/45/594, 1990) which are treaties that define the legal status of personnel employed to assist an international mission; local interpreters could be considered “locally recruited personnel” and regulated as such under these instruments as well as the 1946 Convention on Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations. Such staff would thus be afforded immunity from the jurisdiction of local courts in relation to their official duties. It is therefore of particular interest to the context of interpreters to note that paragraph 46 of the SOFA establishes that “All members of the United Nations peace-keeping operation including locally recruited personnel shall be immune from legal process in respect of words spoken or written and all acts performed by them in their official capacity” (United Nations General Assembly 1990:11). This protection remains valid beyond the end of their service with the mission.

Employment status of interpreters is of particular interest with regard to protection. Local interpreters often do not benefit from regular employment contracts, but are hired *ad hoc* and informally. They are thus deprived of the kind of legal protection that comes with a regular labor contract and are considered to be working in the informal economy. The International Labour Organization, at the 90th Session of the International Labour Conference, discussed Report IV on Decent Work in the Informal Economy (ILO 2002), which states that informal workers are not recognized or protected under legal and regulatory frameworks and that they are characterized by a high degree of vulnerability. They are not recognized under the law and therefore receive little or no legal or social protection and are unable to enforce contracts or have security of property rights. They are rarely able to organize for effective representation and have little or no voice to make their work recognized and protected. They are excluded from or have limited access to public infrastructure and benefits. They have to rely as best they can on informal, often exploitative arrangements, whether for information, training or social security protection (*ibid.*,3).
Internationally recruited interpreters, those that arrive with the military and are hired abroad either through the military or a defense contractor, are covered by employment contracts. Defense contractors have played a very important role in recent wars; they provide specialist staff to the military under specific contractual conditions. As such, they can be considered to fall under the heading of private employment agencies; these are regulated by Convention 181, which was adopted by the International Labour Conference in 1997 and entered into force in 2000. So far 27 states have ratified this convention setting out international minimum standards for private employment agencies. Article 11 provides clear guidance as to the rights of employees hired through such agencies, and could be considered as an important complement to the Montreux Document (ICRC/FDFA 2009) cited above:

A Member shall, in accordance with national law and practice, take the necessary measures to ensure adequate protection for the workers employed by private employment agencies as described in Article 1, paragraph 1(b) above, in relation to freedom of association; collective bargaining; minimum wages; working time and other working conditions; statutory social security benefits; access to training; occupational safety and health; compensation in case of occupational accidents or diseases; compensation in case of insolvency and protection of workers claims; maternity protection and benefits, and parental protection and benefits.

(ILO 1997)

The situation of humanitarian interpreters in conflict zones varies greatly; those working for the International Committee of the Red Cross, for example, enjoy the benefits of a regular work contract; interpreters working for the UNHCR and its implementing partners usually fall into the category of incentive workers — that is, refugees who are employed to work in the refugee camp they live in — and on a grade scale from I to IV they are listed as grade II (semi-skilled job, uncertified, and with informal technical responsibilities). In Afghanistan interpreters working for the US forces (who are usually employed by a military contractor in the United States), as well as local interpreters recruited by ISAF (International Security Assistance Force) and by non-governmental organizations, are at significant risk. Most are instructed not to carry any identification with them that could reveal details about their employment status, so as to reduce the risk of their being targeted by the Taliban. Interpreters and translators in Afghanistan are prime targets for the Taliban (Danish Immigration Service 2012:20).

This discussion of the concept of protection has illustrated the legal complexity of the status of conflict zone interpreters. With the exception of members of the military acting as interpreters, all other categories of interpreters may be considered civilians. This has important consequences for the large number of legal provisions in international law, international humanitarian law, labor law and refugee law that can apply to conflict zone interpreters. This very complexity, however, carries with it a serious drawback in that conflict zones are more often than not legal vacuums, where the rule of law has been suspended, functioning governments are non-existent, and lawless behavior abounds, despite the fact that the four 1949 Conventions have been ratified by 195 states, including all UN member states as well as the Holy See and Cook Islands. The three Protocols have been ratified by 173, 167 and 64 states, respectively. In light of the fact that conflict zone interpreting carries with it exceptional risks, legal certainty in terms of how interpreters are protected is liable to influence the way interpreters carry out the tasks assigned to them. Humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality are difficult to enforce in a work context that is unregulated, where a clear friend-foe distinction is essential, and where interpreters fear for their lives and those of their immediate families. Without an
explicit framework and guarantee of protection, conflict zone interpreters are forced to devise their own strategies of protection; these may entail a loss of neutrality and impartiality, siding with the “employer” who is perceived as providing protection and significant advantages in terms of living conditions in an otherwise harsh and dangerous environment, or altering the messages to be interpreted so as to reduce exposure to immediate and long-term risk.

Interpreters in conflict zones – current situation and trends

As illustrated by the different types of tasks to be accomplished in conflict zones (cf. Table 19.1 above) requiring the support of interpreters, and the different types of actors involved in the various stages of conflict escalation and de-escalation, the notion of a clearly defined “conflict zone interpreter” as one who carries out a clearly specified set of tasks, needs to be abandoned in favor of a coarser categorization that separates interpreters who are members of the military from those who, although they may be working for the military, do not belong to the military. This section will describe the various tasks interpreters carry out in conflict zones and identify the challenges these interpreters face on the job.

Language specialists in the military, also called military linguists, are expected to carry out a range of tasks, such as translate written and spoken foreign language material; interview prisoners of war, enemy deserters, and civilian informers in their native languages; record foreign radio transmissions using sensitive communications equipment; translate foreign documents, such as battle plans, personnel records and operation manuals; and install and maintain equipment used to intercept foreign communications (Careers in the Military 2014). Military contract interpreters may face life-threatening risks: Gunfire, explosions, and human suffering exist in fragile contexts, and interpreters may be sent to assist soldiers to investigate acts of terrorism, such as assassination attempts on political leaders (Meyer 2007). They accompany raids and participate in combat foot patrols, vehicle patrols, ambushes, bomb-clearing and base security missions. They are usually dressed in army fatigues, and they may wear body armor and carry weapons. They are thus clearly identified as being part of the combat unit they are assigned to. Interpreters may control the missions of the soldiers who protect them in that they must precisely communicate what is told to them, as the safety of the entire group the interpreter travels with may otherwise be compromised. This is one of the reasons why using the term “interpreter” in relation to work carried out in the military context may be considered misleading. The French association ANOLIR (Association Nationale des Officiers de Liaison et des Interprètes de Réserve) confirms this assumption, the subtitle on their website clearly indicating that they consider themselves defense language specialists.

According to van Hoof (1962:42) military interpreters are not members of the interpreting profession, as their neutrality and impartiality cannot be guaranteed: they are subject to military orders and discipline, and in many cases also enlisted in the military. Recent initiatives in the United States (Revision of ASTM F2089 Standard Guide for Language Interpretation Services 2007) to move away from the use of the term “military interpreter” and adopt the broader concept of “language specialist” or “military linguist” in this particular context do not merely constitute cosmetic changes, but go to the core of what defines the work of the interpreter. They also provide the basis for developing and refining a code of professional conduct that offers assurances to all parties in an interpreted encounter and thus improves protection for the interpreters themselves.

Inghilleri (2010) describes the ethics training members of the military have been receiving in modern times, which has essentially focused on two approaches: virtue ethics and deontological ethics. The former, Aristotelian approach inculcates moral behavior in members of the military in an effort to create good character. The values most commonly espoused include duty, respect, loyalty, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage. The latter is designed to
encourage members of the military to develop their own reasoning with regard to ethical principles of right and wrong, and is set in a more generalized set of norms established by a broader range of citizens coming from different moral, political, and social backgrounds (Inghilleri 2010:187). This second approach is believed to encourage voluntary adherence to a set of principles and is thought to improve moral intuition. It does, however, challenge the authoritarian character of the military. Still, the objective of a thinking individual who is capable of analyzing ethical problems, when seen against the backdrop of a military linguist’s work environment, should be considered a positive development for navigating the complex interpreting scenarios in conflict zones. Interpreters working in these contexts have little time to reflect upon the ethical dimensions of their actions; they are agents in military action and carry out decisions taken by governments often thousands of miles away. Military linguists may find their role to be much more clearly defined than that of local interpreters embedded in the military or of humanitarian interpreters. Their ethical practice would seem to occur in contexts whose ethical boundaries are less fuzzy and in which their roles align with those of other members of the military with whom they work.

Locally hired interpreters, on the other hand, seem to face more significant ethical challenges due to their being members of the local community and their simultaneous embeddedness in the military. They are not foreign agents but local agents operating on local soil, and are seen as aiding the foreign agents. While pragmatic and personal considerations, especially with regard to livelihoods, are most likely the overriding reasons why local interpreters decide to work with the foreign agents, this does not absolve them of moral dilemmas; on the contrary, it contributes to moral contradictions and makes it difficult for them to clearly define their roles. Local interpreters are forced to navigate rather narrow spaces when it comes to neutrality and impartiality (Baker 2010). On the one hand, they are usually seen as siding with international forces or international organizations due to their employment relationship and the fact that they themselves depend on that employment for their livelihood; on the other hand, they can ill afford to ignore their allegiance to their own local community, to which they would hope to return once the conflict has been resolved.

Just how important these relationships are for the interpreters’ own safety and the trust that the local communities, governments and the international forces or international organizations have in the interpreters’ work is convincingly illustrated in Robinson (2008), who described the trustworthiness of one of the most highly placed interpreters in Iraq, Sadi Othman. Othman, a Palestinian born in Brazil, who grew up in Jordan and was educated by the Mennonites in their tradition of pacifism, and who became a US citizen, decided to join as a military linguist at the beginning of the Iraq war. His extensive cultural and linguistic knowledge, as well as his educational tradition of pacifism, lent him considerable credibility and earned him the trust of both friend and foe (Inghilleri 2010). As such, he was considered to be impartial, and impartiality provides the very foundation on which messages can be transmitted faithfully; this gives assurance to all parties to the interpreted scenario that the interpreter can be trusted, that bias is kept to a minimum and that the interpreter does not advocate for one party or the other. Not being local while still being able to identify with the local culture facilitates role identification, ensures the interpreter’s safety, and promotes message transmission.

The International Committee of the Red Cross, the guardian of the Geneva Conventions, has a policy of not sending its interpreters on missions to countries of which they are nationals, because it is believed that in the humanitarian context the principles of neutrality and impartiality cannot be fully guaranteed if interpreters have close ties to the country they are posted to. While such a policy is difficult to implement, especially in times of acute conflict when a larger number of interpreters with the required languages is needed, the ICRC insists on creating conditions in which the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality can be guaranteed,
the above example of Sadi Othman, and the trust he earned, lends support to this ICRC principle. Being the guardian of the Geneva Conventions bestows a special responsibility on the ICRC to remain true to the humanitarian principles; this has earned this organization the requisite trust of parties involved in conflict, allowing it to operate in even the most dangerous environments in order to provide humanitarian assistance. But even ICRC field interpreters, whose main task is to support ICRC delegates by visiting detained persons in order to verify whether prisoners of war do not suffer from conditions that violate the Geneva Conventions, experience role conflict: the very fact that they speak the local language, the language of the detainee, may lead detainees to reach out to interpreters and take them into their confidence, rather than working with the delegate.

Conflict zone interpreters working for humanitarian organizations, while usually not in the line of fire, find themselves in situations of moral conflict and are exposed to a significant amount of emotional trauma. They are overwhelmingly local interpreters working in a conflict or post-conflict setting, where international actors are not always seen in the most positive light by local communities. Displacement is one of the most common consequences of conflict, making it often difficult to define what is “local”. In the specific work context of the UNHCR, interpreters are regularly needed to implement refugee law. This involves registration of refugees, determining their status (refugee status determination interviews), and deciding on cases for resettlement (resettlement interviews). In all of these cases, displaced persons are no longer close to their home communities and interpreters, themselves refugees, thus engage with members of their former home communities with neither of them being “local”. Traumatic experiences also characterize the fate of displaced persons, with accounts of rape, torture and killings representing the most frequently interpreted narratives for these humanitarian interpreters, according to the author’s training experience in the field. As stated earlier, field interpreters working for UNHCR are refugees themselves, and having to relive their own experience several times a day represents one of the most challenging dimensions of their work (see Chapter 13 on asylum proceedings and Chapter 21 on vicarious trauma). Newly arriving refugees will most often consider the interpreters as their advocates, as they share the same language and culture and seemingly have succeeded in obtaining refugee status. While many harbor some hope of being able to return to their home country, most will want to convince the officers that they should be considered refugees in order to benefit from entitlements. For that they often consider the interpreter as their only ally, which in turn leads to role conflict for the interpreter, who is aware of the legal requirements for establishing refugee status but at the same time shares the language and culture of the applicant. As both applicants and interpreters either live in urban refugee communities or in refugee camps, interpreters fear reprisal from unsuccessful applicants just as local interpreters working for the military do. Neither of them is perceived as impartial and neutral, and in light of their often unclear employment status, neither of them has a legal framework to fall back on. As became evident from Robinson’s (2008) account of Othman, only absolute impartiality and neutrality are likely to create an atmosphere of trust and confidence that the interpreter will not advocate for either side. Raising awareness about the ethical dilemmas field interpreters face on a daily basis, and including both the interpreters and their users (officers working for humanitarian organizations) in training programs that emphasize humanitarian principles as the common framework of reference for all concerned, will ensure improved quality of communication and better security for interpreters. This applies also to other humanitarian field interpreters working in conflict zones who are negotiating access for international organizations to populations in need of assistance, facilitating food distribution to populations in need, or helping convoys navigate the ubiquitous checkpoints. Interpreters experience the tension that often exists between humanitarian actors and recipients of aid, a tension that results from the confluence of a many factors: the fact that people in conflict zones have lost control over their
lives, their traumatic experiences, their lack of power to restore their livelihoods and their exposure to foreign cultures (those of humanitarian actors). Interpreters are perceived as competent in navigating these foreign cultures because they speak the language of power, the one spoken by those who have come to help them. But people in distress, those who have experienced severe trauma, do not always welcome the help designed by others, and humanitarian actors find it difficult to accept that their mission to relieve suffering at times encounters hostility. The humanitarian interpreter thus often needs to navigate mixed emotions on both sides, and the resulting tensions can further aggravate emotional trauma.

**Research and training**

As has been demonstrated in this chapter, the concept of conflict zone interpreting is as complex as the emergencies in which this type of interpreting occurs. A detailed discussion of what can be defined as conflict supported the creation of two broad categories, the military linguist and the humanitarian interpreter. While their specific tasks and the scenarios in which these are embedded can be substantially different, this contextual embeddedness nevertheless creates oftentimes similar ethical and role challenges for the interpreter, in addition to the emotional trauma that accompanies witnessing the atrocities of war and genocide. Research has thus far focused mainly on these dimensions of conflict zone interpreting. Historical accounts (e.g. Wang-chi Wong 2007) offer insight into problems of role and status that seem to persist in modern-day conflict zones. The inception of the *Languages at War* Project by the University of Reading, the University of Southampton and the Imperial War Museum in London brought about a heightened awareness regarding the use of languages at war and the policies and practices that shape language contacts in conflict. The war in the former Yugoslavia provided further impetus for investigating the role of translators and interpreters in a complex setting (Stahuljak 1999; Dragovic-Drouet 2007). The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan then produced a number of media reports as well as publications that focused on the role of interpreters (*The Translator*, Special issue on Translation and Violent Conflict 2010), divided loyalties and the important role played by them in facilitating action on the ground. The types of narratives that emerge in conflict settings and the positionality of the interpreter have given rise to diverse analyses (Baker 2006).

The issue of protection of conflict zone interpreters has been repeatedly highlighted in the media as one that appears to be at odds with their important role in Iraq and Afghanistan. Organizations such as Red T have been set up to establish translators and interpreters as a global, protected community and to safeguard all members of the profession. Little work has been done so far on a detailed analysis of the legal instruments that have considerable potential to enhance the protection of interpreters. The above discussion on protection demonstrated the complexity of the legal framework (Bartolini 2009), but has also provided some promising avenues that could be pursued to regulate the employment status of conflict zone interpreters and thus improve their protection (Palomares and Boustany 2012).

How humanitarian action in conflict zones is perceived by populations at the receiving end of international aid has been documented in the Listening Project (Anderson, Brown and Jean 2012); it highlights the issue of power relations in the field that are often the result of instrumentalization of humanitarian action for political purposes (Donini 2012). Interpreters often face moral dilemmas (Moser-Mercer 2014, Kherbiche and Class 2013), being caught between helping to nurture “that small flame of humanity that can light the way out of chaos” (Moore 1998:ix) and the conflict that befell their communities.

Until recently, training in conflict zone interpreting has not been available. While basic interpreting skills have most likely been taught to military linguists, the complexities of the role...
of the conflict zone interpreter have not been addressed. Local interpreters hired by the military and humanitarian field interpreters have rarely if ever had the time for or access to training. This inspired the creation of InZone, the Centre for Interpreting in Conflict Zones, set up by the Interpreting department of the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting at the University of Geneva. InZone offers a basic course for humanitarian field interpreters in a blended format: on-site training is followed up by virtual training on basic interpreting skills and professional ethics. This is complemented by a more advanced certificate course that includes core humanitarian skills as well as the fundamentals of IHL. Bringing training to casual workers in conflict zones represents a considerable challenge, as training providers must be under the protection of actors in the conflict zone. Improved connectivity and responsible pedagogical approaches in virtual learning have created new learning opportunities for interpreters in the field. While contextualizing training to meet the needs of field interpreters is essential when training opportunities are limited, heritage speakers or members of the diaspora whose countries are experiencing conflict may well see conflict zone interpreting as a new and important responsibility they can undertake to support their country or community. The World Conflict Report (2012) provides little hope that most or all conflicts will soon be transformed and that lasting peace will prevail in the world’s most acute and chronic conflict zones. As long as there are conflicts, interpreters will be needed to help navigate languages and cultures. With improved coverage of conflicts and actors in conflict zones and through direct training initiatives, our understanding of the interpreters’ roles in conflict zones will certainly increase. The field of conflict zone interpreting and its positioning at the crossroads of international relations, diplomacy, humanitarian action and accountability, international law and humanitarian ethics represent an important area of research and action.

Conclusion

Because the field of conflict zone interpreting is still fairly new as far as research is concerned, the general tendency has been to suggest only two broad categories of interpreters working in these contexts: those working with the military, whether members of the military or civilians accompanying the military, and humanitarian interpreters. This chapter preserved these broad distinctions as they appeared to be useful in terms of the differences in protection that were discussed. However, with respect to professional ethics and guidelines for working in different field contexts, more refined categories should be developed in future, perhaps using the above model of conflict escalation and de-escalation to more clearly describe the contexts in which interpreters are called upon to work. This chapter has highlighted the linkages between quality interpreting in conflict zones, protection and ethical decision-making. Conditions in conflict zones are precarious, events are unpredictable, laws, rules and regulations are interpreted by different actors in different languages and against different cultural and administrative backgrounds and in the majority of conflicts the rule of law has been suspended. While interpreters are not the only ones operating in these complex and fragile contexts, their embeddedness and the lack of clarity regarding their role represent considerable challenges to the quality of their service and their rights under international law.

Acknowledgement

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Further reading

The Translator (2010). Special issue: Translation and Violent Conflict. The Translator 16 (2)

The special issue of The Translator and Translating and Interpreting Conflict provides a good overview of the emerging field of interpreting in conflict zones.


Donini offers critical and indispensable insights into how modern-day conflicts are instrumentalized and how this impacts on security and working conditions in the field.


This ILO publication presents the essential components of the organization’s Decent Work program around the core labor standards and offers the international law perspective on interpreters’ working conditions in the field.


The authors provide insights into how professionalization of conflict zone interpreting can improve protection and working conditions in the field.

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Interpreting in conflict zones


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PART IV

ISSUES AND DEBATES
ETHICS AND THE ROLE OF THE INTERPRETER

Uldis Ozolins

Introduction

Issues of ethics have always attended interpreting, as practitioners will often be privy to complex or highly privileged information—whether related to national security, or personal trauma or difficulty, or sensitive business negotiations. Trust in those doing the interpreting is paramount for participants who lack command of the other language, and recognition of ethical practice is fundamental to recognition as a profession.

Moreover, unlike other professions where there is a direct relationship between a practitioner and client, interpreters always work between two parties—either a speaker and listeners (as in conference interpreting) or between two interlocutors in liaison situations; ethical issues can crucially arise for interpreters from the behavior and disposition of either party, and trust has to be obtained from both.

This chapter first looks at how ethical considerations and resulting codes of ethics have arisen in diverse interpreting settings; it then goes on to examine often unresolved ethical issues over role and ethics, linking debates in interpreting to cognate debates in translation studies.

Setting the scene

In her 2000/1 review of ethics in interpreting, Mikkelson argues that considerations of ethics are very scarce in the literature on conference interpreting; overwhelmingly, ethical matters are prominent in fields other than conference interpreting—in legal and health interpreting, in immigration and social security, in the broad area of “community interpreting” (see Chapter 14, this volume). Perhaps more precisely, Pöchhacker defines this field as “professional interpreting in a community-based setting” (2008: 24): the “professional” proviso is crucial, because if interpreting is not carried out by a professional, then ethical responsibility resides only in the participant who hired or invited the particular person to interpret, for that person may not see themselves as professional, nor as having any particular ethical responsibility. And this ethical responsibility may be poorly understood by those seeking bilinguals for interpreting tasks (see Chapter 26 for further discussion of non-professional interpreters).

This field of professional interpreting in community settings has arisen from three significant post-war historical developments:
the increasing movement of multilingual population around the globe through migration, and host societies’ responses to this
the growth in assertiveness of, and service provision for, Deaf communities
slowly evolving changes in attitudes towards and response to the presence of indigenous populations.

Ethical challenges in this field need to be met in often difficult circumstances: the increasing multilingualism brought about by ever more diverse migrant and refugee intakes accompanied by the need to find interpreters results in many new practitioners in such emerging languages not being trained nor having an ethical or professional awareness, or culturally having very different understandings of ethics (Rudvin, 2007; Ozolins, 2010).

By the same token, the field of conference interpreting is also changing, as will be examined below. Whichever field of interpreting is considered, two factors are essential to meet ethical challenges: internally, the profession needs to bring an increasingly diverse group of practitioners to see themselves as having a certain role and identifiable professional commitment, including ethical commitment; externally, there has to be a role perception among non-interpreters needing language transfer that professional interpreters can add value by enhancing communication and acting ethically (Chapter 27, this volume). And this has to take place knowing full well that the diversity of practice by many interpreters may make establishing a consistent professional profile difficult. An immediate recourse, to address both internal and external contingencies, is to develop codes of ethics that detail role expectations.

From code of honor to detailed codes of practice

Several authors have surveyed codes of ethics in interpreting. Schweda-Nicholson (1994) looked at nine codes to show their common emphases: all were of a very similar deontological nature, that is, setting out principles of ethical practice and duty, and deducing from them certain rules of behavior that practitioners need to follow; moreover, as all possible ethical situations could never be enumerated, the principles allow interpreters themselves to extrapolate to come to correct decisions about behavior in relevant contexts.

Schweda-Nicholson identified seven common principles in the mostly North American codes she surveyed:

- The interpreter’s overall role
- Competence and required skill
- Impartiality
- Completeness and accuracy
- Conflict of interest and grounds for disqualification
- Confidentiality, and
- Continuing professional development.

Hale (2007) analyzed 17 interpreting codes from around the world, which again shared the deontological nature already identified and showed considerable overlap with Schweda-Nicholson’s account: Confidentiality was mentioned in 81% of cases, Accuracy in 75% and Impartiality/conflict of interest in 68%. Other areas identified in various codes included Accountability/responsibility for own performance, Role definition, Professional solidarity and Working conditions.

Hale added one other crucial observation, noting that while only a few codes define the role of an interpreter, almost all state what the role of the interpreter is not, which led Hale to
conclude that codes may have a professional improvement role: “the codes seem to be attempting to rectify the practice of many practitioners who are mostly ad hoc and untrained” (Hale, 2007: 124).

At the other end of the spectrum is the code of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC). From other contributions to this volume on conference interpreting (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 11, this volume), it is possible to clearly identify both the view of role and understanding of ethics that characterized this field as it evolved from the 1940s/1950s: conference interpreting was for an international elite, with presumed (or feigned) equality among participants; it could be adversarial (diplomatic disagreement; war crimes trials) thereby demanding strict impartiality; interpreters shared the social background of the participants; and AIIC demanded optimal working conditions and controlled entry to the profession.

The resulting Code of Ethics of AIIC embodies this history and background (http://aiic.net/node/2410/code-of-professional-ethics). After a brief preamble, the Code’s main sub-section is entitled “Code of Honour”, an almost antique appellation, reflecting the organization’s view of its own place in its international environment. Here there is only one item that can clearly be recognized as an ethical principle – that of “absolute secrecy” in any interpreting assignment not conducted in public (Article 2a). There is no mention of impartiality, of accuracy, or of role – from this code, it would be impossible to say what a conference interpreter does or does not do; nothing relates to the actual practice of interpreting. There is, however, a stipulation that interpreters must not behave in a way “which might detract from the dignity of the profession” (Article 4b). There follow several paragraphs on the quality of equipment and resources that interpreters must have, and the requirement that working with non-members of AIIC can only be tolerated if they undertake to work under the same conditions as AIIC members, and that standards of remuneration must not be undercut.

The AIIC code thus serves as an enunciation of presumed excellence, a guarantee of discretion, and an affirmation of professional solidarity and indeed privilege: “it was the technology-based simultaneous mode that made conference interpreting a much-admired feat commanding high social esteem – and substantial fees” (Pöchhacker, 2008: 322). Moreover, AIIC’s rigorous demands for novices to interpret for stipulated hours under supervision by existing members makes it possible to avoid any mention of role or detailed practice or other ethical principles because of the assumed common professional socialization of its members.

In her international survey of interpreting standards, Bancroft quotes views that AIIC had a particular effect in Europe of discouraging regulation of interpreting (by external or government authorities) and thus discouraged other professional codes of ethics (Bancroft, 2005: 11). European codes of ethics can be conveniently located at the International Federation of Translators (FIT) European regional website (http://www.fit-europe.org/ethics-deontologie.html). A number of European codes (often of court interpreters) reflect the AIIC approach, giving virtually no details on role or practice, and confining ethical principles to confidentiality and maintaining the dignity of the profession, for example, the Netherlands Association of Interpreters and Translators explicitly calls itself a Code of Honor. But there is diversity too – some codes such as the German Association of Interpreters and Translations (BDU) devote considerable attention to possible mediation of disputes between members or members and outsiders.

Yet several codes do not follow this pattern, both within Europe and the New World, and the more the codes refer to community settings, the more they detail ethical practice and role. Just as conference interpreting arose out of specific historical contexts and sets of significant players, so interpreting in community settings can be characterized as having the following contextual features, succinctly delineated by Gentile (1997) and Garber (2000): it was characterized by social difference between parties – typically, institutional representatives or professionals...
dealing with immigrants, the Deaf or indigenous participants, with clear power asymmetry; situations could be adversarial or therapeutic, educational or informative; the interpreter often came from the minority group themselves (except significantly for the majority of sign language interpreters); and at least initially, bilinguals were recruited haphazardly to perform such interpreting.

Such clear social and institutional differences among participants may themselves lead to ethical issues, quite apart from any language differences; all professions working in such areas have codes of ethics to guide contact.

**Sector-specific codes – differences in perception of role**

Many of the interpreting codes of ethics internationally are sector-specific codes, such as those in the USA, where many aspects of interpreting are organized in sector-specific ways – including certification and training. They also tend to be very detailed: for example, the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care (NCIHC, 2004) has a one-page code of ethics much along the lines of Schweda-Nicholson’s examples, but this then has a 20 page explanation of the code with detailed examples of practice. An even more detailed explanation of standards in 88 pages is the California Health Care Interpreter Association’s *California Standards for Healthcare Interpreters*, sub-titled *Ethical Principles, Protocols, and Guidance on Roles & Intervention* (CHIA, 2002). Clearly such degree of detail provides very extensive guidelines for interpreters and those who work with them in a situation where there are highly variable levels of certification, experience, training and professional socialization among healthcare interpreters (see Chapter 15, this volume).

On the issue of role and interventions, both NCIHC and CHIA set out four roles for the interpreter:

- Message converter
- Message clarifier
- Cultural clarifier, and
- Patient advocate.

In both cases the documents justify in great detail the last two roles, saying these must be exercised with caution but must be available as roles for an interpreter in case of gross institutional failure such as racism towards patients, neglect of non-English speaking patient needs or obstacles to access. Here, ethical issues for interpreters can arise directly from the behavior of other participants and institutions.

One example of this is a duty of care issue, where it becomes the duty of interpreters to convey issues that can affect the patient’s health but which the patient does not convey themselves or specifically asks not to be interpreted, and a decision-tree is provided to show alternative actions an interpreter can take: the *Standards* do not specify when an interpreter *must* intervene, but the decision-tree shows the likely outcomes (for all participants) if certain actions are or are not taken (CHIA, 2002: 56ff).

Yet such conceptions of role and intervention are at odds with codes in the legal field in the USA. There, codes such as that of the National Association of Judicial Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT) define a much more restricted role for interpreters. But, like the health codes, they do this in great detail. NAJIT sets out its *Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibilities* in one (closely-printed) page, in a series of “Canons” of behavior. It firmly bars any intervention or advocacy, stipulating that the interpreter “shall not give advice to the parties or otherwise engage in activities that can be construed as the practice of law” (Canon 4) (www.najit.org/about/NAJITCodeofEthicsFINAL.pdf).
Somewhat contradicting Hale’s previously mentioned observation that many codes do not say what the interpreters role is, NAJIT’s first canon of its code, on Accuracy, spells out the court interpreter’s role in great detail:

*Canon 1.* Source-language speech should be faithfully rendered into the target language by conserving all the elements of the original message while accommodating the syntactic and semantic patterns of the target language. The rendition should sound natural in the target language, and there should be no distortion of the original message through addition or omission, explanation or paraphrasing. All hedges, false starts and repetitions should be conveyed; … The register, style and tone of the source language should be conserved.

Guessing should be avoided. Court interpreters who do not hear or understand what a speaker has said should seek clarification …

While legal interpreting codes are largely concerned with controlling the behavior of the interpreter, on certain points such a getting clarification, or asking for repetition or ensuring turn-taking, the codes do mandate the interpreter controlling the behavior of others.

**Generic codes**

Several countries have ethical codes that are generic in nature, which follows from the organization of language services or certification or training systems. Significantly, however, understandings of role show variance here as well, with some reflecting in another way the USA split between healthcare and legal interpreting.

The National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI) code in the UK appears to identify two different roles for interpreters:

5.7 Practitioners carrying out work as Public Service Interpreters, or in other contexts where the requirement for neutrality between parties is absolute, shall not enter into discussion, give advice or express opinions or reactions to any of the parties that exceed their duties as interpreters; Practitioners working in other contexts may provide additional information or explanation when requested, and with the agreement of all parties, provided that such additional information or explanation does not contravene the principles expressed in 5.4.

(www.nrpsi.co.uk/pdf/CodeofConduct07.pdf)

Clause 5.4 states that “Practitioners shall interpret truly and faithfully what is uttered, without adding, omitting or changing anything; in exceptional circumstances a summary may be given if requested.” Yet surprisingly, the code does not say which specific contexts require “absolute” neutrality and which do not. And it is not clear how the permission to “provide additional information” can be reconciled with the stipulation of 5.4 to interpret “without adding, omitting or changing anything”.

Questions of role also become central where the NRPSI code describes where interpreters may intervene. As noted, allowing certain interventions is characteristic of American healthcare codes; the NRPSI is however a generic code (NRPSI interpreters cover all public sector areas), yet partially follows the USA healthcare pattern on interventions:

5.12 Practitioners shall not interrupt, pause or intervene except:

5.12.1 to ask for clarification;

5.12.2 to point out that one party may not have understood something which the interpreter has good reason to believe has been assumed by the other party;
5.12.3 to alert the parties to a possible missed cultural reference or inference; or
5.12.4 to signal a condition or factor which might impair the interpreting process
(such as inadequate seating, poor sight-lines or audibility, inadequate breaks etc.).

Even within its own terms, again it is hard to see which of the second or third of these interventions would be appropriate in situations of absolute neutrality and which in “other contexts”.

It is tempting to see the distinction made in the NRPSI code as essentially one between legal and non-legal contexts, yet the equivocation on this matter prevents any easy judgment. Such a legal/non-legal distinction is however germane in the codes of the Irish Translator and Interpreter Association [ITIA], which has a general code on ethics, covering both interpreters and translators, and one specifically for community interpreters. The Irish general code makes a specific reference to interpreting in legal situations and, more explicitly than the NRPSI code, differentiates legal interpreting from other contexts:

4.3. Where an interpreter or translator is working in any matter relating to the law,
the client’s statements must be interpreted or translated by the idea communicated
without cultural bias in the presentation, by the avoidance of literal translation in the
target language or by giving of advice in the source language.

(www.fit-europe.org/vault/ITIA_code_ethics.pdf)

Interestingly, there are not specific requirements for other contexts, apart from the normal tenets of confidentiality, impartiality etc.

Both Irish codes explicitly warn against advocacy as falling outside the interpreter role. As might be expected, the community interpreting code goes into more detailed technique issues, such as prescribing that interpreters “not emulate the gestures made by the speakers; they have already been seen.” But a unique point in the Irish Association’s general code, starkly reflecting the historical origins and present status of interpreting in Ireland, is an item under Professional Standards which exudes unusual aggression:

6.1 The Association does not, and will not, support translation or interpreting work
done in the Republic of Ireland into or out of any other language on behalf of a
citizen of the Republic or other nationality by

and then lists at length: “amateurs”, children and family members, students, practitioners not members of a professional association, and “undocumented non-nationals or refugees whose status in the State has not yet been determined”. (Ibid.)

While seemingly extreme, this is not so very different to the mention of controlling entry to the profession contained in the AIIC code; point of entry to the profession is of particular concern to the interpreting profession around the world due to the past or continued deployment of unprofessional interpreters, a continual hindrance to professionalization. These are battles the interpreting profession has to have.

By contrast, a small number of generic codes can be identified that do not follow a legal/non-legal distinction of role, and do not promote advocacy, but support one generic role across different sectors. Perhaps the most instructive here is the Canadian code National Standard Guide for Community Interpreting Services (NSGCIS), which is based on standards of practice developed by the Language Interpretation Training Program for Ontario Colleges (LITP). It is endorsed
inter alia by Canada’s Healthcare Interpreter Network, yet its preamble makes explicit its deviation from the healthcare codes of the USA:

Unlike the CHIA, NCIHC, and IMIA [International Medical Interpreters Association] standards, the LITP Standards of Practice do not endorse cultural brokering and advocacy. … the LITP Standards of Practice differs in purpose as it is intended to be a broad guide for interpreting in several settings, and not exclusive to the health care setting.

(NSGCIS, 2007:21)

It explains its stance by referring to earlier Canadian conceptions of interpreters as being “cultural interpreters” with a role to bridge “cultural misunderstandings’ between service providers and non/limited English speakers”, but such interventions, it is argued, created conflict for all parties: acting as a “cultural broker/bridge” itself goes against the principle of impartiality “and furthermore begs the question of the demonstrated competence of the interpreter to perform that function”. The code eschews advocacy, and promotes one role for all interpreters under the familiar headings of confidentiality, impartiality etc.

The NSGCIS has wide acceptance by many organizations, including the healthcare interpreting organization, demonstrating that a code based upon impartiality can also be accepted in the health field. The position of the code of the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT), the national professional body, is similar, except that it covers both interpreting and translating: it is widely prescribed by virtually all agencies, language services and end users as the code by which practitioners must abide, whether they are members of AUSIT or not (www.ausit.org). Significantly, this comes in a situation with a national accreditation authority providing generic (non-sector-specific) accreditation at a number of levels: paraprofessional, professional and advanced (conference Translating and Interpreting) level (www.naati.com.au).

While essentially the AUSIT code covers the same terrain as the NSGCIS, two nuances are worth noting. First, AUSIT’s code attempts to show that responsibility for good translating and interpreting (T&I) outcomes must be shared between practitioners, agencies and end users: it argues that those agencies or end users that stipulate that practitioners must follow this code of ethics also share some responsibility to provide the material and professional conditions for doing so – for example, adequately briefing interpreters, chasing up problems in source text documents for translators, ensuring safety in the interpreting environment, and attending to interpreter needs such as the need for breaks. Second, it pays attention to institutional issues, recognizing that some interpreters (for example in-house interpreters) may have other duties apart from interpreting, but stipulates that interpreters need to make clear when they are acting as interpreters and when in another capacity; when in the interpreter role, impartiality is paramount.

Codes in non-Anglophone countries reflect the varying dispositions of the profession along the spectrum from conference to liaison interpreting. While a number of European codes, especially those of court interpreters as mentioned above, follow the AIIC model of having little to say about the substance of interpreting, the closer the codes come to liaison interpreting work the more they correspond to the Irish, British, American and Australian codes. Thus the French service ISM-Interprétariat stresses an ethics of impartiality but also one of adaptation of interpreting techniques to meet challenges in a diversity of settings often characterized by power differentials between participants (ISM-Interprétariat, n.d.). The Swiss Association for Community Interpreting and Cultural Mediation in its succinct code stresses the importance of interpreting both for immigrants and the institutions that service them, and mentions briefing, demanding suitable conditions for work, and ensuring all participants understand their role.
It advises on how to handle clarifications and adding explanations in interpreting, and adapting vocabulary and style to interlocutors, as well as mentioning the common issues of neutrality and confidentiality and competence (Swiss Association for Community Interpreting and Cultural Mediation, 2005).

Bancroft reports that outside of North America, Europe or Australia, “AIIC is often the de facto code for general interpreters”, with liaison/community interpreting often in its infancy and codes of ethics needing to be developed, and often lack of recognition of sign language interpreting (Bancroft, 2005: 17). Individual exceptions to this overall negative picture do exist, such as Israel, where a telephone health interpreting service begun in 2007 has a strong component of ethics and standard setting (Schuster, 2013: 76).

**Ethics outside of codes: conflict situations; business interpreting**

Mikkelson in her 2000/1 article did predict that the conference interpreting field, hitherto arguably least concerned with ethics, is likely to undergo significant change:

> As conference interpreters find themselves working in situations that touch on the same matters that community interpreters deal with (war crimes trials, extradition hearings, international truth commissions and refugee human rights conferences, for example) they will find that ethical issues become more and more part of their daily work.  
> *(Mikkelson, 2000/1: 54)*

Involvement of conference interpreters in situation of conflict, and the use of local interpreters during foreign military interventions, has given a particularly sharp edge to ethical issues. For Thomas (2003), the main ethical issue is one not for interpreters but for those who recruit them, in his case in Kosovo during the brief intervention by the Kosovo Verification Mission [KVM] when local interpreters were targeted by the Kosovo and Serb warring parties – in some cases by both sides. The Mission did not offer any protection to the interpreters or allow them to leave Kosovo when KVM decamped, and Thomas points to cases of professional locally recruited interpreters being killed or needing to flee as a result of their activities.

For Inghilleri, her ethical focus is different again, looking at how locally recruited interpreters in Iraq ethically chose to work for the Americans and their allies, “whether or how … interpreters, like their soldier counterparts, might assume some responsibility for the ways that wars are conducted” (2011: 99). Like Thomas, she notes the “contingent nature” of interpreters’ position when they are not offered protection when they relinquish their roles, and the huge discrepancies in pay, conditions and protection for the military interpreters that come with the occupying force, compared with locally employed interpreters. (See Chapter 19 on interpreting in conflict zones for more discussion of these issues.)

Inghilleri is concerned with theoretical issues of supposed neutrality of interpreters, a wider theoretical issue that will be dealt with below. However she is also interested in the question of how military interpreters, whether local or imported, progress from being “linguistic conduits” to becoming “conduits for the military”, performing important functions of advising on cultural aspects and finding information, where locally recruited interpreters may have particular advantages, but where they do so without any overarching code of conduct *(ibid.: 122)*. Unlike Thomas, however, she does not regard the local interpreters as professionals; for her they are “by definition” non-professionals and thus their decision to work in this case for the American military is “often grounded more in ordinary morality given the absence of a role morality attached to any professional status as an interpreter” *(ibid.: 100).*
The burgeoning literature on interpreters in conflict situations (see Chapter 19, this volume) pays particular attention to the issue of embededness of locally engaged interpreters. Policy responses have included the establishment of an innovative international training program (Tipton, 2011: 31), and the founding of the NGO Red-T, bringing attention to the need for interpreter protection and the adoption of a UN resolution on protecting interpreters, as has been declared for journalists (www.red-t.org). Red-T, AIIC and FIT have jointly issued a guideline Conflict Zone Field Guide for Civilian Translators/Interpreters and Users of Their Services (Red-T, 2012).

Finally here, conference interpreters, but other liaison interpreters also, are widely involved in business interpreting: while in some cases interpreters can play an impartial role between business parties, very often if they are hired by one particular party then a strong ethic of power, hierarchy, team loyalty and partiality is evident; moreover, in business contexts interpreters because of their language skills may be asked to perform a variety of functions other than interpreting, depending on degree of experience of participants working with interpreters (Ko, 1996; Dodds, 2011). Interpreters surveyed will often express their unease at seemingly departing from their established codes of ethics in such situations, since role boundaries are extremely difficult to identify. Business meetings will often have multiple participants, of varying hierarchy and often with different degrees of knowledge of the other language, leading to manifold issues in turn-taking, in-team and cross-team communication and who to interpret for (Takimoto, 2006, 2008). Participants in business encounters are very concerned with the building of rapport and interpersonal relations as well as technical matters, and interpreters are vitally involved in building this rapport; at the emotional level, the interplay of interpersonal and commercial issues in negotiations can often lead to frustration, manifest in various ways, from deliberate indirectness to open angst, and coping with frustration places the interpreter in a very sensitive area where anticipating or managing conflict becomes paramount (Ko, 1996; Spencer-Oatey and Xing, 2009).

Business interpreting is currently the area of interpreting with probably the least research and analysis of ethics, as it is heavily protected by considerations of commercial confidentiality, but it demands attention in future discussion of ethics.

This array of interpreting settings shows that the distinction hitherto between conference interpreting and interpreting in community settings does not adequately cover this diverse interpreting field. A conceptually available way to distinguish all other areas from conference interpreting is to define them as liaison interpreting (Gentile et al., 1996; Sandrelli, 2001). Such interpreting is characterized by two features:

- It is a situation of interaction, a dialogic rather than a monologic situation
- It is a personal encounter – usually face to face, but it can also be mediated, for example by telephone or video

And it is these features of interaction and personal presence, in highly varied contexts, that often raise ethical issues. (For further discussions see Chapters 12–17, and 19.)

**Interpreting ethics, theory and translation ethics**

Recent literature has shown intense debate over role, ethics, and how well ethical codes can inform practice (see Valero-Garcés and Martin, 2008 for an overview). A highly critical school has particularly focused on the concepts of impartiality, neutrality and invisibility and the conduit model of interpreting, stressing the agency of interpreters and their profound effect upon communication dynamics (Angelelli, 2004; Bot, 2003; Clifford, 2004; Metzger, 1999; Roy, 2000;
Rudvin, 2007; Tate and Turner, 2002; Wadensjö, 1998). In this literature, codes of ethics favoring impartiality, neutrality and a restricted role have been heavily criticized. Some of the critiques of codes focus on their inapplicability to particular areas, for example Bot’s critique of codes in relation to health and mental health:

Because the codes of ethics and codes of conduct of community interpreters are still strictly focused on interpreters as non-persons, defined for their role in judicial situation, there has been little room for a discussion about a code of conduct suitably defined for daily practice in (mental) health care.

(Bot, 2003: 35)

Others have a more general critique of conduit-focused codes, asserting that the dominant model of interpreting has been of the “machine” kind:

the interpreter is essentially just a device that takes no part in communicative proceedings other than dispassionately to relay messages between individuals not sharing a common language.

(Tate and Turner, 2002: 374)

Clifford, in a seminal article to which we will return, sees the conduit model as having not only a distorting but a hegemonizing influence on understandings of interpreting: he recites descriptions in the literature of interpreters as needing to be “invisible”, “neutral”, “direct linguistic translators”; other descriptions talk of the “uninvolved” or “mechanical” role. Moreover this is an ideal with particular force, for much instruction of interpreters, in health settings in Clifford’s case, takes “the moral high ground, by arguing that remaining faithful to the language forms uttered by patient and practitioner allows the interpreter to act ethically” (Clifford, 2004: 92).

Yet interpreters are not invisible and they act in various ways in interaction; Tate and Turner make the incisive point that

the hegemony of ‘machine is the only way because it is the only way to be uninvolved’ has created a conspiracy of silence … This very conspiracy forces interpreters into the position of making their discretionary choices and exercising power covertly with the result that individual interpreters find themselves resolving in isolation the inevitable role conflicts of their job.

(Tate and Turner, 2002: 375)

How can these issues about role be resolved, and a clear ethical stance maintained by interpreters? We will conclude this chapter by looking at three alternative ways of conceptualizing codes of ethics and role – the approach of virtue ethics in translation by Chesterman; the different forms of developmental ethics of Clifford, and of Dean and Pollard; and the defense of current codes as allowing for ethical but non-mechanical practices by Tebble.

Ethical issues have been prominent also in translation in recent decades, with again a focus on supposed invisibility and neutrality of translators, influenced strongly by Venuti (1995): the 2001 Translator collection edited by Pym entitled “The Return to Ethics” brought together both interpreting and translating interests to bring fresh insights into this area, a move continued in the 2011 Interpreter and Translator Trainer collection where editors Baker and Maier argue that “accountability is now a key issue in all professions, and that the responsibility of translators and interpreters extends beyond clients to include the wider community to which they belong” (Baker and Maier, 2011: 1).
It should be said immediately that there are some significant differences between the ethical concerns of translators and interpreters: in interpreting the bulk of ethical issues arise in interaction with other parties, while such interaction is a minor part of translation ethics. Also, translation ethics does not focus on (potential or real) adversarial relations, which have been fundamental in interpreting in determining the role of interpreters, and lead to sharp differences in attitudes towards role in non-adversarial encounters. Nevertheless, the common interest in questioning existing ethical models links the two fields.

Chesterman’s enchanting article “Towards a hieronymic oath” (2001) in the Pym collection starts with an arresting example of Hopi Indian ethics which stresses two principles: “Do no harm” and “Think about things”. Chesterman then advances his argument by looking at the original Hippocratic Oath, and identifies these two principles in that oath – mentions of strict forbidding of certain harmful actions, plus a striving for excellence and self-improvement on the part of the physician to care for the health of the patient, and passing on the knowledge gained to students of the profession. Chesterman sees the parallels with the translator’s situation where there need to be explicit warnings against doing harm (lack of accuracy, lack of comprehension of source text), plus the aspects of virtue ethics – concern for self-improvement, treating texts fairly, striving to always understand the context of the translation.

Chesterman believes hitherto approaches to ethics in translation have been limited and contradictory. He identifies four such approaches:

- **Ethics of representation**, which is traced back to ancient notions of fidelity of texts and adequately representing the author’s intentions
- **Ethics of service**. Based on commercial principles, here the translator is ethical if they understand the purposes (skopos) of the translation and carry out the commissioner’s instructions and timelines
- **Ethics of communication**. Here the emphasis is not on representing the other but on communicating with others, “to further intercultural cooperation between parties who are ‘Other’ to each other”; thus, the ethical translator is a “a mediator working to achieve cross-cultural understanding” (Chesterman, 2001: 141).
- **Norm-based ethics**. This arises from descriptive translation studies (Toury, 1995) and explains norms in terms of expectations; the ethical translation is that which conforms to these norms; this in turn builds trust in the translation and translator.

Despite their appropriateness for some kinds of translation, Chesterman points to fatal flaws in each conception. The representation model suffers from intractable problems of what can be an adequate representation; the service model seems to champion translator invisibility in the face of overriding client specifications, as does the norms model which seems very conservative by not allowing overturning of norms; while the communication model seems to set no limits to the translator’s responsibility, being concerned with effects on the target culture.

Chesterman turns to McIntyre’s virtue ethics for a way out, arguing that the pursuit of excellence itself is a virtue that can characterize all kinds of practices, professional or otherwise, and he sees virtue as “an acquired human quality that helps a person strive for excellence in a practice” (Chesterman, 2001: 145). For translators, Chesterman’s Hieronymic Oath is based on the translator having an idea of how a good translator behaves, wanting to be a good translator, and striving for excellence in their practice.
Chesterman characterizes this as an ethics of commitment, and he finds such examples in some current codes of ethics for example the ATA Code of Professional Conduct and Business Practices, which begins:

As a Translator or Interpreter, a bridge for ideas from one language to another and one culture to another, I commit myself to the highest standards of performance, ethical behavior, and business practices.

(ATA, quoted in Chesterman, 2001: 150)

Now, this is a rarity among codes of ethics, which much more commonly take a rule-based deontological approach. It may be reasonable to assume here as well, that this kind of approach typifies a professional association which can demand particular qualifications and professional socialization of its members, as evinced by the ATA’s own membership policies. Such a corps of qualified, professional and (presumably) responsible members may well be the kinds of practitioners Chesterman was envisaging when claiming the superiority of a virtue-based code.

Chesterman’s own Hieronymic code also takes one further step: as in the Hippocratic Oath, Chesterman sees that the essential commitment is to advancement of excellence not only for the individual practitioner, but for the profession. His code asserts:

I swear to be a loyal member of the translators’ profession, respecting its history. I am willing to share my expertise with colleagues and to pass it on to trainee translators. I will not work for unreasonable fees. I will always translate to the best of my ability.

(Chesterman, 2001: 153)

The wider question then is whether this model of an oath-like code of ethics is suitable for other areas of T&I. Again the issue of common professional socialization and standards would appear to be crucial; lacking these, such commitments to excellence may be difficult to sustain, and for many areas of interpreting such a virtue-based code may serve poorly as a guide to practice, or as a guide to what end users can expect of a practitioner.

One variation of such a virtue approach comes from Camayd-Freixas an interpreter who became well-known after publicly exposing a controversial raid by immigration officials on low-status undocumented Latino farm workers in the USA; Camayd-Freixas was not supported by his professional association in his public pronouncements, and he views this as arising from a lack of overarching values in codes of ethics and professional association understandings of their role. He cites as a significant innovation the approach of the Massachusetts court interpreters code, which begins with a statement of guiding principles including “assure meaningful access, protect the constitutional rights, ensure due process, and ensure equal protection of the law for non-English speakers”, an example of meta-ethics informing an interpreter code (Camay-Freixas, 2013: 27).

Returning to Chesterman’s approach, his fundamental injunction to ‘do no harm’ has resonance for interpreting ethics, and seems to be the basis for example of Inghilleri’s very critical view of local interpreters recruited in Iraq and their servicing the occupation there; more generally, this concern underpins those items in codes which stipulate what is not the role of the interpreter.

Another quite different approach to interpreting ethics is the challenging work of Dean and Pollard (2011), who also critique the usual deontological approach but who seek answers in the evolving sophisticated understanding on the part of the practitioner of the demands placed on the interpreter, and the degree of control the interpreter can exercise over the interpreting environment. They argue that interpreting is a “practice profession” (such as medicine or law enforcement) rather than a “technical profession” (such as engineering), as interaction with other participants is central to its exercise, and for such professions context and the ability to
respond to changing contexts are crucial. They state a by now familiar critique of rule-based approaches to ethics:

Interpreting students receive a mixed message when educators assert a non-contextual, rule-based approach to ethics while simultaneously responding to both ethical and translation questions with “It depends” – an obvious reference to the centrality of context in decision making.

(Dean and Pollard, 2011: 155)

Moreover, like Tate and Turner, they see that deontological codes that neglect issue of context do actual harm to interpreter practice:

codes of ethics that prescribe or prohibit particular interpreter behaviors, without comment on situational context or preferred work outcomes, lead most interpreters to conclude that the proper ethical decision is to adhere closely to behavioral dictates and to perceive deviations from them as either unethical or allowable only temporarily and/or secretly.

(ibid.: 158)

The methodology they provide is for practitioners to precisely get through those “it depends” situations, and situations where interpreters fear departure from prescribed norms. Their own demand-control schema approach, which they describe as a teleological rather than deontological approach, stresses the consequences of various options taken up by the interpreter in the course of an assignment. The methodology is a careful analysis of the job challenges (demands) that arise in specific interpreting situations and the potential responses (or control options) an interpreter can develop in their repertoire. This depends upon analyzing not only what the participants enunciate in the encounter, but already anticipating what will come by becoming part of the “thought worlds” of the participants; concerns for ethics then span the whole encounter, identifying appropriate responses to any phase of the encounter and any demands that arise. They analyse demands in four categories – environmental, interpersonal, paralinguistic or intrapersonal, and show how controls can be exercised by the interpreter in each situation. From this focus on understanding participants and analyzing the encounter, they argue “that critical reasoning in the service of work effectiveness equates to ethical reasoning, even if an ethical dilemma per se has not arisen” (ibid.: 155).

Dean and Pollard’s work raises the question of to what extent codes can respond to the contextual varieties of the situations encountered by interpreters, and which approaches can get beyond the “it depends” shortcoming. Their own approach is spelled out in strong terms:

We argue that a teleological approach to decision making and a corresponding code of ethics that emphasizes values and principles associated with optimal practice outcomes (rather than dictating or prohibiting specific behaviors) are the preferred means for teaching and evaluating interpreting decisions, that is, a decision making approach that is fitting to a practice profession.

(ibid.: 159)

Clifford (2004) explicitly supports the view of interpreting as a practice rather than a technical profession; and in the context of medical interpreting he introduces a very practically-grounded developmental perspective, in an attempt to overcome a recurrent theme in much writing.
about T&i ethics – the perceived gap between codes of ethics and institutional requirements to go beyond such codes.

Clifford does take into consideration the interpreter’s working environment and observes that interpreters themselves go through a developmental process as they learn their craft and specifically learn more about the institutional context in which they work; moreover, this is not a simply a growing general confidence they gain, but it importantly takes place in interaction with other health professionals, establishing a working relationship which can change their style of interpreting and take the interpreter into a teamwork situation, little considered in existing ethical codes.

In a survey of health practitioners, Clifford was initially puzzled by seemingly contradictory responses by health professionals in what they expected of interpreters: while many stressed “word for word” translation and in every way supported a conduit model of interpreting, others saw interpreters as being very helpful in allowing them to understand patients; and where clinicians themselves worked as members of teams “they expected interpreters to function as members of that team” (Clifford, 2004: 106). The issue of trustworthiness was critical, but this was directly linked to the interpreter’s perceived competence: “Eventually, if [clinicians] have seen evidence of the other’s clinical competence, they will begin to develop a trusting relationship” (ibid.: 108).

Clifford sees this process developmentally in three phases: the first is where the interpreter is a stranger and the clinician wants full control over the encounter and conduit-like interpreting; the second where the clinician sees the interpreter’s worth to “make sure he’s not falling down”, perhaps by making some obvious cultural mistake; and the third is full acceptance of an interpreter as a member of a team who can see and comment on aspects of the communication – “is she getting it?” – or bringing other knowledge of the patient to bear.

Clifford also ties this back to the theoretical aspects of ethics and the various schools of thought previously analyzed by Chesterman: the first phase of control and conduit-like interpreting is ethics as representation; the second phase of building a relationship is ethics as understanding; the third phase demonstrates trust: “The interpreter has demonstrated an ability to abide by the norms of the medical setting”, which in turn signifies “a progression from the ethics of representation, through the ethics of communication, to the ethics of respect for norms” (ibid.: 110).

For Clifford, this takes us out of an ethics purely about linguistic form to an ethics of cooperative performance: “There may be a linguistic component in the role that interpreters play, but that role is inherently a social one. The ethical principles we present to interpreters must reflect this reality” (ibid.: 111).

Tebble (2012) however, is not convinced codes of ethics are deficient in explaining ethical practice or in giving guidance on ethical issues encountered. Taking the AUSIT code of ethics as an example, Tebble argues not that a code can specify action for any conceivable ethical situation encountered, which is impossible, but that it does constitute an ideology that can correctly guide professional practice and in particular provide an adequate account of role and how this role can be made understandable to other participants in any encounter. Focusing too on medical encounters, Tebble notes that the AUSIT code encourages interpreters to enunciate their role, especially where other participants are uncertain of this role. She also notes the requirements in the code to obtain briefing where possible, but goes further however to pose a particular stage of the encounter, which can be realized explicitly or implicitly, as “the contract”, whose purpose is “to promote the manner of participation in the interpreted dialogue” (Tebble, 2012: 32). This can be accomplished if there is a briefing beforehand, or the interpreter can succinctly state this at the beginning of the encounter, for example that she will interpret everything that is said, or that all information will remain confidential. In some cases a clinician may enunciate this contract. The contract then paves the way for the interpreter to carry out their function of interpreting and coordinating the turns in the conversation.
For Tebble, despite the cryptic nature of the code, an understanding of its clauses does provide an extensive guide to practice; the totality of items on role, asking for clarification or repetition, correcting mistakes and ensuring that environmental conditions are appropriate “specifically allows for the interpreter to deal with much of the metalingual function of the interpreted dialogue” (ibid.: 42).

Tebble’s points allow a more critical view to be taken of precisely those critiques of conduit interpreting earlier referenced. Such a point is reinforced if we look outside the medical area and look at judicial interpreting: in the NAJIT first canon on Accuracy, quoted earlier, it is difficult to see the role prescribed there as demanding an invisibility or mechanical and uninvolved role on the part of the interpreter; far from it: “All hedges, false starts and repetitions should be conveyed; … The register, style and tone of the source language should be conserved. Guessing should be avoided. Court interpreters who do not hear or understand what a speaker has said should seek clarification.” Presumably, this may be considered a paradigm case of conduit interpreting, yet it hardly suggests the interpreter is invisible, mechanical or lacks agency. Interestingly, such behavior may also be perfectly appropriate in other settings as well – in some areas of mental health interpreting, for example, where conveying discourse features is crucial, though that field will also require other additional resources of an interpreter (see Bot, this volume), and on Tebble’s view there is no need to look outside the code for justification for employing such resources.

It may be possible to expand on Tebble’s notion of a “contract” in that it need not only come in a declarative form from the interpreter or clinician. A contract may also be part of a team-building with another professional in a briefing session where the interpreting will have specific purposes – for example, what features of language are to be conveyed in a speech pathology situation; how incoherence in a psychiatric interview needs to be handled; how to build rapport in a business encounter; or how to interrogate civilians – or combatants – in a war zone. The purpose – skopos – of an encounter, so widely recognized now in translation studies for working with texts, needs always to be understood. Where there are particular purposes that have important implications for the style of interpreting demanded, general codes can be supplemented by shorter sector- and institution-specific guidelines.

Pollard and Dean’s systematic demand-control schema, Clifford’s explicitly developmental model and Tebble’s explanation of a code as helping an interpreter establish their role are all concerned to lay the foundations of trust and build a potential partnership between participants in transmitting meaning; yet a code must necessarily be tactically careful not to impose or sanction a partnership model that can be taken as license to assume any role at all. This balance of giving guidance to establish trust and communication but maintaining limits on role is perhaps an inevitable and perpetual tension in any code.

Conclusion

As can readily be seen, the field of interpreting shows some significant debates over role, though this should not be taken to mean that there is not a common ethical understanding of the interpreter’s work: while there is robust theoretical debate over conduit or neutrality, the number of items in codes in which there is divergence over role is very small and has been identified: advocacy or not in health settings; degree of cultural explanation; some differences between legal and non-legal settings.

The overwhelming degree of common understanding of ethics may also be difficult to identify because of the substantial detail that is included in many codes. The field may still be very far from being able to adopt codes that stress only excellence and discretion. Codes of
ethics remain in some cases the only document or learning about role some interpreters will have, or end users will have; thus they play a vital educational role. And such codes are crucial in underpinning a loyalty and duty to the profession on the part of practitioners, many of whom may not have extensive professional socialization.

Yet argument persists over whether present codes enforce a mechanical or rule-bound ethics on interpreters. The many arguments surveyed in the last section above take us forward in considering the nature and purpose of interaction between interpreters and interlocutors, where we have the building of expertise by an interpreter matched by the building of teamwork with other participants; this building of teamwork is something that few codes yet, it seems, have been able to accommodate, or perhaps even attempted, and indicates serious work for the future.

Finally, codes of ethics can only go so far in establishing actual ethical behavior among interpreters and an understanding of interpreter role by other participants. Attention to education, selection, regulation where appropriate and raising of professional consciousness and solidarity constitute the long march that is and must be undertaken in all countries where interpreting flourishes. The other contributions in this volume show how far interpreting has come in that march.

Further reading

Bischoff A et al., (2012) Staying in the middle: A qualitative study of health care interpreters’ perceptions of their work. Interpreting 14(1): 1–22. Interpreters view their central role as interpreting healthcare interactions, but they are often left to do more with minority patients because – who else will?

Camayd-Freixas, E. (2013) Court interpreter ethics and the role of professional organizations. In Schäffner et al. (eds), 15–30. Arising out of a controversial public intervention by an interpreter, the article argues for the need to include higher values of citizenship and human rights in interpreter codes of ethics.


References


Codes of ethics


FIT [International Federation of Translators]. Codes of European member organizations http://www.fit-europe.org/ethics-deontologie.html


“Please, Grandpa, do not kill me; when I grow up I will never be a Tutsi again.” The courtroom went silent as a witness in a trial described the events on a fateful day in the hills of Rwanda. Led in examination-in-chief, she narrated how she took her children to her Hutu father-in-law, in the hope that they would be safe. Before her very own eyes, the grandfather butchered all of them one after the other. The last of them to die, after his siblings were killed before him, pleaded with the grandfather to be spared. His efforts were futile. A few minutes later, he lay dead. His Hutu grandfather was not ready to brook any compromise with Tutsis or “cockroaches,” as he called them.

How does one recover after hearing and interpreting such gruesome testimonies? There is no doubt that events spanning the 100 days of carefully planned carnage in 1994, and claiming approximately 800,000 lives, left a gaping scar on the African continent. It also dramatically impacted the lives of those who worked in the court sessions of the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, especially those of the interpreters who carefully listened to and interpreted the narratives of the surviving witnesses. It is they who provided the first-person voices in these stories: “I killed,” “I raped,” “I was raped,” “I slaughtered,” “I beat,” “I was stabbed,” “I was abused,” “I was beaten,” “my child was hacked into pieces”, “my mother was buried alive”, “all my family members were killed”. Repeatedly, the interpreters listened, visualised, analysed, understood and re-expressed what they heard.

Research has shown that the effects of covering traumatic events or working with traumatized persons over a long period of time can actually have negative effects on those providing the assistance themselves (McCann and Pearlman, 1990). This chapter is about vicarious trauma (VT) in the context of interpreting, in general, and in the context of community interpreting (criminal justice, education, health, social work, humanitarian work, etc.), in particular. In these contexts, interpreters must personify any variety of the participants in the interactions, including patients and therapists; victims and witnesses, killers or perpetrators, prosecutors and defence counsel – and sometimes all of these – during a single communicative interaction. This chapter will elucidate the effects of being the voice of so many in such difficult circumstances and outline the kind of stress suffered by the interpreter, especially in a criminal courtroom setting. This stress can have an impact on the work and performance of the interpreter, on friends, family, colleagues, on beliefs, and on life in general, especially since unlike the therapist, the social worker, the priest, the counsellor, or the court magistrate who may have direct contact
with the victims and interact directly to assist them, the interpreter may feel powerless, as he/she sits in the booth and bears witness to the victims’ pain more as a spectator. We will begin by defining the key terms that are used in the field, followed by a review of the salient literature on the subject. After discussing the results of research on VT in general we will focus on studies of VT among interpreters in particular. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for best practice.

What is vicarious trauma or vicarious traumatization?

Research has established that those who work with victims of violence suffer serious VT due to their daily contact with these victims and their stories. Among the researchers are Maslach (1982) with her work on burnout; McCann and Pearlman (1990) with their work on vicarious traumatization; Figley (1995) with his work on compassion fatigue; Catherall (1995) with his work on secondary traumatic stress; Dutton and Rubinstein (1995) with their work on post-traumatic stress disorder; Saakvitne and Pearlman (1995) with their work on VT; Ochberg (1988) with his work on post-traumatic therapy; Rothschild (2000) with her work on the effect of trauma on the body; and Richardson (2001) with her guidebook on VT. However, not much research has been done regarding interpreters.

Ochberg has been a leading authority on the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) since the 1960s. An expert on PSTD and the Stockholm syndrome, he helped define trauma and PTSD. Figley started studying traumatized nurses in 1970. He is the editor of the series on “Compassion Fatigue” which focuses on trauma and secondary traumatic disorder on those who provide therapy to the traumatized, and their treatment. The first book of the series, Trauma and its Wake, was published in 1985. Other pioneer work in the field of VT, in addition to that done by authors noted earlier above, includes Pearlman and Maclan (1995), who described the profound effects suffered by professionals exposed to the traumatic experiences and narratives of those they work for and with, in their study titled “An empirical study of the effects of trauma work on trauma therapists”. They laid the foundation for most subsequent work on stress, trauma and vicarious traumatization management.

In the literature reviewed, VT is often linked to post-secondary traumatization, burnout, compassion fatigue and countertransference. It is therefore necessary to define these terms in order to understand the signs we may see and differentiate them. For Gilmore (2011, p.4), “Burnout refers to extreme circumstances where the worker is suffering personally and professionally from their work; it is usually accompanied by a high degree of negativity. Compassion fatigue came from Charles Figley who used it to refer to people who suffer from being in a helping capacity for a long time. “Countertransference in the context of psychotherapy is the distortion on the part of the therapist resulting from the therapist’s life experiences and associated with her or his unconscious neurotic reaction to the client’s transference” (1995, p.9).

Ochberg (cited in Landau 2009) makes a distinction between compassion fatigue, which for him is empathy developed by therapists when listening to traumatized persons, and vicarious trauma, which goes beyond that. He says the following: “It’s not that I am feeling sorry for them and empathizes with them, it’s that I am becoming them”.

McCann and Pearlman first used the term vicarious traumatization in 1990 specifically with reference to the experience of psychotherapists. Talking about vicarious traumatization, McCann and Pearlman (1990, p.133) stated that “Persons who work with victims may experience profound psychological effects, effects that can be disruptive and painful for the helper and can persist for months or years after work with traumatized persons. We term this process “vicarious
traumatization”. At the vanguard in the field and authors of numerous studies and articles on the subject, Saakvitne and Pearlman defined vicarious traumatization as being:

a profound change in the therapist sense of meaning, identity, world view, beliefs, and about self and other … Vicarious traumatization refers to a transformation in the therapist’s (or other trauma worker’s) inner experience resulting from empathic engagement with clients’ trauma material. That is through exposure to clients’ graphic accounts of sexual abuse experiences and to the realities of people’s intentional cruelties to one another and through inevitable participation, re-enactments in the therapy relationship. The therapist is vulnerable through his or her empathic openness to the emotional and spiritual effects of vicarious traumatization. These effects are cumulative and permanent and evident in both the therapist’s professional and personal life … [it] is marked by profound changes in the cores aspects of the therapist’s self or psychological foundation.

(Saakvitne and Pearlman, 1995, p.151)

Primary traumatisation refers to the impact of trauma on the actual victim of the traumatic event. This may be applicable to workers if they have experienced their own trauma. Secondary traumatisation is usually about family members or close friends who witness a loved one’s traumatic event. It can also refer to workers who actually witness a client’s trauma.

A related concept is vicarious terror, which emerged after the 9/11 attack in New York (LaRowe, 2007) stated that:

Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the war in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the ongoing war on terror, compassion fatigue may be redefined to include vicarious terror. Vicarious terror may be understood much the same as vicarious trauma, except the method of transmission is the media rather than face-to-face contact. Vicarious terror relies on the repetitive barrage of images and sound bites crafted specifically to induce the physical, mental, and emotional response of vicarious trauma, especially dissociation. Dissociation is another word for feeling separated, isolated, and disconnected from yourself and others – it is a state of emotional and even physical numbing. It is the result of a continual and repetitive barrage of noxious stimuli that slips below our mental radar while registering and accumulating subconsciously as a condition I call “wired and tired”.

Other concepts have also emerged: vicarious transformation, survival strategies, and vicarious resilience. Vicarious transformation has to do with hope, spiritual growth, a greater appreciation of gifts in one’s life. On this topic Saakvitne and Pearlman state that: “The spiritual damage, or loss of meaning, connection, and hope, that can signal vicarious traumatization is profoundly destructive and attending to one’s spiritual health is critical to survival and growth. Developing a spiritual life means something unique to each individual; it will entail finding a way to restore faith in something larger than oneself, whether by reconnecting with the best of all that is human, with nature or with a spiritual entity” (1995 p.167). Valent (1995, p.28) talks about survival strategies in dealing with trauma. For him: “stress responses can be adaptive or maladaptive. Adaptive stress responses deal with stresses in such a way that life is not actually or potentially compromised … it is suggested that illness seriousness is determined by the difference between pre-and post-stress equilibria, and that illness nature depends on the components of trauma, including survival strategies. Benefits occur when responses are adaptive and post-stress equilibria are more life enhancing than prestress ones”.

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A related concept is *vicarious resilience*, coined by Hernandez, Gangsei and Engstrom (2007), who interviewed psychotherapists who work with victims of political violence and kidnapping about their perceptions of their clients’ overcoming of adversity. This led them to speculate that work with trauma survivors has the potential to affect and transform therapists in a unique and positive manner. They thought that introducing this concept into the professional vocabulary may help therapists develop a useful resource to strengthen the work they do by focusing on a process that is different from vicarious traumatization, but is generated in similar relational dynamics. They declared that “[they] noticed that among the psychotherapists working with torture survivors, some made specific reference to the inspiration and strength they drew from working with clients whom they sometimes described as ‘heroes’” (2007, p.230).

According to Hernandez, Gangsei and Engstrom (2007, p.234), those interviewed in their study described ways in which witnessing their clients overcome adversity affected or changed the therapists’ own attitudes and emotions. Witnessing and reflecting on human beings’ immense capacity to heal and reassessing the dimensions of one’s own problems were the most common themes in this regard. For example, one of the participants stated, “After working with people who have suffered these kinds of problems, your definition of a problem changes. One takes issues with more ease. One defines what is serious differently” (ibid.). Understanding the role of spirituality and religion and seeing clients as sources of learning were also typical responses.

Dutton and Rubinstein (1995, p.83) said that *trauma workers* are “persons who work directly with or have direct exposure to trauma victims, and include mental health professionals, lawyers, victim advocates, caseworkers, judges, physicians and applied researchers among others” (p.83). It is to be noted that the list is not exhaustive, and the term “among others” could easily include court personnel involved in events such as the Rwanda trials. In fact, in self-survey data collected from 105 court judges,

The majority of judges (63%) reported one or more symptoms that they identified as work-related VT experiences. Female judges reported more symptoms, as did judges with seven or more years of experience. In addition, female judges were more likely to report internalizing difficulties, while judges with more experience reported higher levels of externalizing/hostility symptoms. Coping and prevention strategies were multi-domain (i.e., personal, professional, and societal) and underscored the need for greater awareness and support for judges.

(Jaffe, Crooks, Dunford-Jackson and Judge Town, 2003, p.1)

This suggests that interpreters sitting in these same courtrooms face similar challenges. Thus, VT is a professional and occupational hazard for the interpreter in criminal proceedings and should be treated as such and also given the same attention as for judges. Indeed, there is need for greater awareness and support for criminal courts interpreters, and it is thus important for the interpreter to know about VT in order to recognize its signs and symptoms.

**Causes of vicarious trauma**

According to almost all pioneers in the field, VT is caused by repeated exposure to the stories of trauma, the narratives of traumatized persons and images of traumatized people or graphic images of war zones, and also by the desire to assist, to help. An additional cause is the fact that sometimes one feels useless, especially when one is not in a position to provide that assistance. The “trauma worker” eventually identifies himself with the victim or the patient, the traumatized person.
Saakvitne and Pearlman (1995) also state that VT in individuals can be exacerbated by personal factors, the nature of the work, the social, political and cultural, family context, past and present circumstances. For them: “Two sets of factors contribute to a therapist’s vicarious traumatization: (1) specific characteristics of the therapy and its context, including characteristics of the clients, the nature of the work itself, and the political, social and cultural context within which both the traumatic events and therapy take place, and: (2) particular characteristics and vulnerabilities of the therapist and the way he or she works”. (Saakvitne and Pearlman, 1995, p.152). For Valent (1995) “Throughout the whole process, endowments resist while vulnerabilities facilitate the noxious effects of stresses. For example, family may be a social strength whereas isolation may be a social vulnerability” (p.29).

This suggests that the personal circumstances “the personal characteristics and vulnerabilities” of the trauma worker quoted above, are important in VT. It can be inferred from it that those living alone, those who are single, those with family problems are more likely to develop VT; those with issues of alcohol abuse, those who have dealt with infidelity, those who have been in abusive relationships, those from dysfunctional homes, those with fragile health, those new to the profession, etc. Thus, many challenging factors have to be taken into account, especially in view of the absence of prior training for interpreters to be able to deal with traumatic material.

For many analysts and critics of the media, the media itself is at the origin of widespread compassion fatigue in society because they saturate newspapers and news shows with often de-contextualized images and stories of wars, tragedy, calamities, disasters and human suffering. Benedict Carey (2011, p.1), a science reporter for The New York Times, in an article titled “Becoming Compassionately Numb”, says the following:

Do we have no more room in our hearts to care for this Haitian earthquake victim? The only thing tanking faster than consumer confidence and the Greek economy would be the global compassion index, if such a measure existed. Consider just a few recent news items: Americans are balking at extending unemployment benefits, and even disaster relief was in doubt for a time last week in another of Washington’s budget skirmishes; Europeans are cutting payments to pensioners; and “there’s no mood for intervention” to avert famine in Somalia, according to one diplomat. At a recent Republican presidential debate, the audience erupted into cheers upon hearing Texas’s nation-leading rate of executions.

This shows that people are tired of seeing images of disasters, violence, floods (in the Philippines for example), earthquakes (Haiti for example), terrorists attacks, plane crashes, wars, boats filled with immigrants sinking, famine, destruction, mass killing, shootings, bombing (9/11 bombing of the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York for example), hurricane and tornados, tsunamis (Japan), landslides, and of hearing only gloomy reports about the world economy; as a result, they are becoming insensitive, cynical or resistant to helping those who are suffering. For Figley: “Trauma workers are more susceptible to compassion fatigue. This special vulnerability is attributable to a number of reasons, most associated with the fact that trauma workers are always surrounded by the extreme intensity of trauma-inducing factors. As a result, no matter how hard they try to resist it, trauma workers are drawn into this intensity” (1995, p.15).

Beaton and Murphy (1995, p.51) use the term “crisis worker” to speak of others subject to these factors, including “firefighters, paramedics, emergency medical technicians, ambulance drivers, law enforcement personnel [police, highway patrol, sheriff], rescue workers [red cross and disaster workers] and disaster response teams.”
As seen from these descriptions, those affected by traumatic events cover a wide range of professional positions dealing with traumatic events or working or in contact with traumatized persons.

**Signs and symptoms of vicarious trauma**

The available literature shows that the common signs and symptoms of VT include, but are not limited to, social withdrawal, aggression, greater sensitivity to violence, sleep disorders, exhaustion, headache, nightmares, intrusive imagery, cynicism, numbness, sexual difficulties, eating disorders, helplessness, difficulty in relationships, among others.

Saakvitne and Pearlman (1995) wrote that the effects of vicarious traumatization on an individual “include significant disruptions in one’s sense of meaning, connection, identity, and world view, as well as in one’s affect tolerance, psychological needs, beliefs about self and others, interpersonal relationships, and sensory memory, including imagery” (p.151).

Jaffe et al. (2003, p.4) classify the signs and symptoms of VT on the basis of time span, i.e. short-term symptoms: sleep disturbances, intolerance for others, physical complaints; and long-term symptoms: sleep disturbances, depression, and a sense of isolation. They state further that:

The surveyed judges [in their study] indicated a wide range of symptoms that they identified as stemming from their work, including cognitive (e.g., lack of concentration), emotional (e.g., anger, anxiety), physiological (e.g., fatigue, loss of appetite), PTSD (e.g., flashbacks), spiritual (e.g., losing faith in God or humanity), and interpersonal (e.g., lack of empathy, sense of isolation from others) symptoms. Clearly, judges’ exposure to the graphic evidence of human potential for cruelty exacts a high personal cost. (ibid., p.6–7)

**Remedies for addressing vicarious trauma**

A number of studies have been done about measures and mechanisms to prevent and/or treat VT. According to Catherall (1995), institutions dealing with trauma survivors inevitably encounter Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) and it takes a toll on the functioning of the staff if deliberate measures are not taken and proper mechanisms put in place to prevent or at least limit its effects. Such institutions include: “police departments, fire departments and emergency medical technicians teams as well as those that must deal with trauma survivors such as hospitals, mental health clinics, and employee-assistance programs” (p. 232). For him, “the first rule is that a preventive mechanism should be in operation before incidents actually occur: (1) psycho-education, (2) preparedness, and (3) planning. Exposure to STS cannot always be avoided, but institutions can ensure that (1) the stress is recognized and (2) the exposed members have the best possible opportunity to process the stressful experiences in a supportive environment” (1995, p 233).

Saakvitne and Pearlman (1995, p.153) state, “Fundamentally a therapist’s [trauma worker’s] sense of self is a critical factor that allows the therapist [trauma worker] to attend to his or her own emotional, spiritual, psychological and physical needs. A strong sense of self and self-respect will allow a therapist [trauma worker] to take the necessary preventive and ameliorative steps”.

Murray and Royer (2008, p.80) agree:

The reality is that work with or on behalf of people who have been caught up in traumatic situations affects those who do the work. The issue is not whether helpers are immune or not, but rather whether the helpers have appropriate and sufficient
strategies in place to manage the impact of that traumatic material. If they do, their relationship with the client will have greater value for the client.

Dutton and Rubinstein (1995, p.94) classify possible coping responses:

Personal strategies might include taking time for play in addition to work, developing a network of emotionally supportive personal relationships, taking time for self-exploration and attending to personal needs, and using personal therapy as a mean of coping with effects of working with trauma. Professional strategies refer to using peer supervision and consultation, working in a professional setting with others rather than in isolation, and diversifying one’s professional practice.

According to McCann and Pearlman (1990, p.145), it is essential and important to look for coping mechanism and:

It is important to tap into potential sources of support in one’s professional network. The helper should first avoid professional isolation by having contact with other professionals who work with victims. These contacts can provide opportunities for emotional support for one’s work in addition to the professional and intellectual support they offer. Professionals within a geographical area might organize support groups for helpers who work with victims. These support groups can be facilitated by experienced professionals who are sensitive to the personal effects of working with victims. Such groups can be focused around three major issues: normalizing the reactions helpers experience in the course of this work; applying constructivist self-development theory to understanding one’s specific reactions; and providing a safe environment where helpers feel free to share and work through reactions that are painful or disruptive.

Vicarious trauma among interpreters

Following up on the research cited above, we will focus here on two studies on the effects of VT specifically on interpreters, and on a narrative of exchanges between a group of interpreters/colleagues of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and myself in 2013.

The first study is by Martyn Swain (2011), a conference interpreter, who interviewed interpreters employed at the International Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and Rwanda (ICTR), and at the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He noted that in these courts “testimony is occasionally, if not frequently, emotionally charged … ‘Most testimonies are traumatic, we are dealing here with murder and rape most of the time’”. Swain wanted to know how “in interpreting situations such as these … interpreters view their professional obligations and in particular the injunction contained in the section on Truth and Completeness in the 1999 Code of Ethics for interpreters at the ICTY” (Swain, 2011, p.50).

The Code of Ethics mentioned above states that:

a) Interpreters and translators shall convey with the greatest fidelity and accuracy, and with complete neutrality, the wording used by the persons they interpret or translate.
b) Interpreters shall convey the whole message, including vulgar or derogatory remarks, insults and any non-verbal clue, such as the tone of voice and emotions of the speaker, which might facilitate the understanding of their listeners.

(ICTY, 1999, p.14)
Swain’s objective was to find out if interpreters remained detached from the emotional charge communicated in the original testimony or if they considered it “a professional obligation to reproduce the tone as well as the lexical content of such utterances … If they are affected by the emotional charge of the testimony … if this has an impact on their output” (Swain, 2011, p.50).

Many of Swain’s respondents indicated that they sought to maintain a degree of detachment from the speaker, focusing on the technical aspects of message production and on the facts that had to be conveyed. Others, however, felt that it was unprofessional to remain detached and that conveying the emotional content of an utterance was a professional obligation as well. (It should be noted that the interpreters in Swain’s study were working in booths, which is rarely the case for interpreters in national courts.) A questionnaire that Swain asked respondents to complete indicated that the interpreters used a range of coping strategies in order to be able to reproduce the harrowing testimony in detail, including such things as pretending the testimony was unreal, connecting the tales to similar accounts read in books, and ensuring that they engaged in completely unrelated tasks when they weren’t interpreting. One respondent from the ICTY went so far as to say this: “I only listen to the harrowing account during my half hour and try to do something else when I am not working. It is not very professional, but I feel I can listen and interpret but not just listen” (ibid., p.52). In short, the interpreter was not ready to listen when it was not her turn to work. This reaction can be characterized as the numbness mentioned earlier.

According to Swain (ibid.) “this comment reveals that the need to disengage from emotionally charged testimony while not performing the task of interpretation means that the interpreter will not listen to the accounts while they are not on their turn ‘on mike’”. In line with the rules adopted by AIIC (Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence), Swain goes on to say that “it is generally accepted in the profession that interpreters work in teams in order to be able to assist each other by, for example, looking up technical terms which the colleague on mike is having difficulty in finding. Obviously, if the second interpreter is not listening, they will not be aware when this is happening; moreover they will not be familiar with the arguments under discussion when it is their turn to be on mike” (ibid., p.52).

The second study, by Lor (2012), explores the experiences of interpreters in mental health settings and examines how working with clients that have experienced torture, trauma, and war can impact their personal and professional lives. Lor states:

A review of current literature reveals that there is not enough effective and appropriate training for interpreters; that interpreters frequently experience role conflicts while working with clients; and that interpreters are frequently emotionally impacted by the traumatic material they interpret. The literature review also reveals a gap in the research on the use of interpreters with refugee clients and populations. (Lor, 2012, p.i)

She interviewed four interpreters regarding their experiences as interpreters in handling traumatic client material. She found that the majority of these interpreters “… experienced emotional, psychological, and some cognitive impact in varying degrees, and that they struggled to manage and cope with on a regular basis” (ibid., p.i).

Lor’s findings suggest that a majority of the “participants have struggled or are struggling with components of VT throughout their interpreting experiences and would benefit from more training; additional coping and self-care strategies; guidance on how to navigate changing relationships in the community; and more focus on the healing and hope that can come from their role” (ibid., p.i).
Exchanges/conversations with interpreters/colleagues of the ICTR in 2011

The ICTR, located in Arusha, Tanzania, was established by Security Council resolution 955 of the 8th of November 1994: “for the Prosecution of Persons Responsible for Genocide and other Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law Committed in the Territory of Rwanda and Rwandan citizens responsible for Genocide and other such violations committed in the territory of neighbouring states, between 1 January 1994 and 31 December 1994” (ICTR, 1995, p.1).

The ICTR began indicting a number of higher-ranking persons for their role in the Rwandan genocide in 1995. People from around the world were recruited by the United Nations to work for the ICTR: judges, prosecutors, lawyers, investigators, interpreters, among others. The working languages of the ICTR are English and French, and Kinyarwanda, which is the language spoken in Rwanda, was also used (especially by witnesses and accused persons).

Initially, about eight interpreters were recruited, and I was among them. Our first assignment was to assist investigators in Kigali, Rwanda, in the ICTR Prosecutor’s Office, translating statements from interviews with genocide victims and witnesses (1995–1996) and servicing their meetings, and then some of us were subsequently transferred to Arusha, Tanzania when hearings started there in January 1997.

Translating witness statements was already traumatizing, but hearing the victims and the witnesses narrate their ordeal in person was even worse. The training received at school does not prepare an interpreter to work in this kind of environment. After a few years on the job, hearing the same atrocities on a daily basis and repeating everything in the first person, most interpreters could see serious changes in their behaviour and in their life in general, and they witnessed the same phenomena in their colleagues. We wondered what was happening, and following exchanges with a few colleagues on these changes, I put some questions in writing to four of them who had been working with me at the ICTR for a minimum of five years. The questions were as follows:

You have worked for the ICTR for quite a while and you are still working as an interpreter for the same organization. Could you share with me your experience in the face of all the gory narratives you heard in the courtroom. Were you affected psychologically, physically, professionally, emotionally, spiritually? If the answer is yes, what were the symptoms and their manifestations as a result of what you had to witness in the courtrooms. How would you call it?

Responses were collected and are presented here in five categories based on the type of trauma reported. These categories are psychological, emotional, physical, professional and spiritual trauma.

Psychological trauma

All four interpreters said that at the beginning, during the first two years, they experienced a constant fear of dying a violent death; for one of them, that fear made him reluctant to visit countries like Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, war zones where some of the atrocities were committed. They had nightmares, were easily annoyed; [They] reflected on the wicked nature of the human being. As a consequence of this experience, they trivialized death, [they had] become insensitive to other people sufferings. They were numb. One of them said he did not wish to die, but he wished he could just “exit”, just exit in open air, walk and walk and keep walking ad infinitum.

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Emotional trauma

The interpreters reported feelings of isolation, anger, irritability, deep sadness and frequent tears in the face of the life ordeals and unbelievable stories they interpreted. One interpreter said that during one of the hearings a witness spoke about “A surreal scene of cold blooded murder and cannibalism that interpreters in the different booths had to interpret in the first person singular ‘I’, that will definitely stick with him for life”.

Physical trauma

The interpreters also reported physical sensations that they attributed to their experiences at the tribunal. These included goose pimples, stomach rumbling whenever the subject of violent death or murder was discussed, constant fatigue, exhaustion, irritable bowel syndrome, thyroid problems, sporadic episodes of constipation or diarrhoea, sleeplessness, over-eating, insomnia, headaches, and high blood pressure.

Professional trauma

The experience had an impact on their professional lives as well. They reported: a reluctance to be assigned to work for court hearings; anxiety and stress when entering the interpretation booth in the courtroom, wondering what would be heard; duress while working; a desire to leave the job and do something else; and a deterioration in the quality and quantity of work.

Spiritual trauma

All four interpreters reported having questions related to their religious faiths. They wondered where was God during the genocide, where was He at the time of the genocide? Who was God in the end? If He was a good God, how did He allow such atrocities to happen? They experienced philosophical thinking of this nature, questioning at times, the very existence of God. They also noted mistrust in spiritual leaders (priests and pastors who denounced refugees and participated in mass killings or the destruction of churches). Was religion and Christianity still worth it? Why so much hatred? This culminated in personal soul-searching, as well: Was the money earned at the ICTR worth it? Was it clean money? Or was it, as one interpreter called it, “blood money”?

The findings of this questionnaire were consistent with the observations of McCann and Pearlman (1990, p.140), who noted that “the helper may also find his or her own view of human nature becoming more cynical or pessimistic … This diminished view of humanity may be associated with feelings of bitterness, cynicism, or pessimism”.

All four interpreters said they had to find ways to survive and not be completely damaged by the victims’ traumatic experiences. One of them said, using the French word “anesthésié”, that he decided to “sedate” himself, suppress his emotions, in order to survive. In the end, all four recognized that as time went by, this experience had definitively changed their life. They were no longer the same persons. They decided to enjoy everything that life offered, one day at a time, and appreciated the fact that they were alive, even if they feared that some of the things buried within themselves could resurface someday in a way or the other.

This eventual outcome is supported in Lor’s findings that:

According to a majority of the participants, this struggle to manage their own thoughts and emotions does gradually improve with time. Many participants felt that with time,
they were able to learn from their mistakes, get further training, become less sensitive to client trauma through extensive exposure, and resolve or affirm their motivation to stay within the interpreting profession. All the participants also stated that as they gained more training, more experience, and more skills as an interpreter, their obligation and feelings of responsibility to continue interpreting for their community also grew.

(Lor, 2012, p.37)

Some of the effects described above can be quite severe and I would like, here, to narrate in more detail the story and personal experience of the female interpreter among the four interpreters of the study. After about a year of court sessions at the ICTR, she realized that she was exhausted, stressed out, depressed, frustrated, inhabited by a sense of fear. She had sleepless nights and chronic headaches due to the workload, having to service court sessions four to five days in a week and sometimes for more than six to seven hours a day, but also because of the horrendous narratives of the victims and witnesses, the graphic images in the photos, the footages and, worse still, the fact that at all times she was personifying the victim, the killer, the judge, the defence counsel. When they killed, she killed. When they were raped, she was raped. When they described how they saw people hacked into pieces, she saw it. When babies were cut into pieces or boiled before their parents’ eyes, they were her babies and she could see them dying and felt the pain. That pain lingered on and the images haunted her. She had become one of the victims, feeling everything they narrated; she had become the killers confessing their crimes in gory terms, and she was reacting to these narratives. She found the worst scenarios to be those of gang rape cases in which the victims were violently mutilated and then killed. She developed thyroid problems, had problems with her vocal cords and could not speak properly for some time. She did some research to understand what she was experiencing, and realised that she was suffering from VT. She was physically and emotionally reacting adversely to her experiences and was affected by them so acutely that even her body had developed a protection mechanism. The pain in her throat actually prevented her from being assigned to cover court sessions.

The four ICTR interpreters said they consciously started valuing what they had, their families, their lives as a whole. They understood and appreciated how privileged they were not to be the ones sitting in the witness box narrating the atrocities, and stopped complaining about what they termed “trivial things”; one actually said that, looking back at the way he lived before, he wished he could erase everything and start afresh, because he now knew what life was, that it was to be valued and cherished. They ended up admiring the victims, the traumatized persons for their resilience, their capacity to adapt, rebound and revive. These victims had outlived their trauma and rebuilt their lives; some of those who had lost entire families had remarried and built new families, some had even forgiven the perpetrators of the genocide and said they were praying for them. They became some kind of “heroes”, true models to emulate. Inspired by their example, the interpreters became stronger and with time, they decided to distress and do their job more efficiently to assist in the administration of justice.

Conclusions and recommendations

In light of the foregoing discussions, while there is no doubt that interpreters in general and particularly those working in the specific settings described in this chapter, as part of society, play a major role in making a better world thanks to communication, it is also clear that they face a major challenge as they engage in their profession: the risk of VT and its consequences.
1 Identify people who could develop VT

For Yassen (1995, p.178) in his study on *Preventing Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder*, prevention is key to avoiding vicarious trauma. For him: “unless we prepare, plan or attend to the effects of STS, we can cause harm to ourselves, to those who are close to us, or to those who are in our professional care”.

I personally believe that preventive measures should be given priority. Some interpreters are completely unaware of the condition and do not know about VT. As noted in this chapter, some interpreters do not realize the toll that their job is taking on them until it is too late. They must do their homework, know what they are engaging themselves in, know their limits and know when to decline an offer should it jeopardize their physical/mental health. In the event they accept these offers, they need to be aware of what may be awaiting them and find out ways to minimize the trauma, and talk to specialists who can give them advice as to what approach to adopt. It must always be borne in mind that, depending on one’s profession and particular circumstances in life, the reaction to the trauma events is different and that individuals may experience different effects. Being informed and ready for the possibilities is crucial.

2 Provide counselling

Based on my 16 years of experience in general interpreting across the African continent plus 17 years in a criminal court like the ICTR, a typically traumatic work environment, my proposal is that counsellors be made available to interpreters before they assume duty, while on duty and after their assignment. Depending on the capacity of each interpreter to manage stress and trauma, he/she should see a counsellor on a regular basis and as often as deemed necessary. The interpreter who is taking up the delicate assignment of personifying traumatized persons on a daily basis, and for long hours, needs to have counselling services readily available.

3 Teach people how to address VT

As we can see from what is elucidated above, there are many ways of addressing VT. In my exchanges and conversations with colleagues of the ICTR, described above, we agreed that it is important to understand and identify the trauma, to exchange tips on how to deal with it, things that work, some good practices. Some said they cried when they were overwhelmed with tension, but they also actively looked for things that would make them laugh. Since there was no support mechanism in the ICTR, we agreed to have some informal peer sessions among ourselves to exchange experiences, talk about our problems, and strive together to look for solutions. We further decided to do some research and apply some of the many solutions proposed and to adopt the ones that work. For us, at the top of the list of measures that lessened the trauma were physical exercise and reviving spiritual life. We also did our best to leave office matters in the office. Another decision was to spend time with our families, joke, laugh and relax. It really made a huge difference.

4 Learn lessons from VT

It is noteworthy that we find solace in the discovery that there is a silver lining to this stress and attendant VT, namely, vicarious transformation and vicarious resilience as defined above. There certainly is something positive in the impact caused by those who manage this situation well and come out enriched. They feel that they are better persons inside for having witnessed all they
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heard, saw and felt in the exercise of their duties. As a result of the resilience developed, they feel victorious and stronger.

As regards the way forward, what emerges is primarily the fact that this situation must be addressed, for it would be preposterous, not to say tragic, if interpreters, like rescue squads, set out to save lives, yet ended up losing their own. Similarities with criminal court judges can easily be seen in the amount of physical, psychological, material and spiritual damage that is revealed in the wake of thousands of hours put in by interpreters in traumatic situations. Just what the future will be for any of us who worked at the ICTR is yet to be determined.

Further reading


The purpose of this study was to identify the best mechanisms of prevention and interventions for STS and VT to develop a systems protocol to shield therapists from the impact of working with traumatized clients.


This article recommends that treatment teams prevent secondary trauma in therapists by identifying and altering trauma engagement patterns.


This guidebook focuses on violence against women, the trauma suffered by them and by those helping them and actions to be taken to end that trauma and the suffering.


The author defines the skills and experience required for interpreters working with extremely sensitive information and a wide range of emotions.


The authors focus on the stress of the interpreter in a hospital setting, dealing with trauma and traumatic material and suggests ways to cope with stress.

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REMOTE INTERPRETING

Sabine Braun

Introduction and definition of key terms

The evolution of communication technologies has created ample opportunities for distance communication in real time and has led to alternative ways for delivering interpreting services. On the one hand, mobile and internet telephony have made telephone communication more flexible, enabling conference calls with participants in two or more locations. On the other hand, videoconferencing has slowly established itself as a tool for verbal and visual interaction in real time, also between two or more sites.

Two main uses of telephone and videoconference communication can be distinguished in connection with interpreting. One of these, remote interpreting (RI), refers to the use of communication technologies to gain access to an interpreter in another room, building, town, city or country. In this setting, a telephone line or videoconference link is used to connect the interpreter to the primary participants, who are together at one site. Remote interpreting by telephone is nowadays often called telephone interpreting or over-the-phone interpreting. Remote interpreting by videoconference is often simply called remote interpreting when it refers to spoken-language interpreting. In sign-language interpreting, the term video remote interpreting has established itself. Remote interpreting is best described as a method of delivering interpreting. It has been used for simultaneous, consecutive and dialogue interpreting.

A similar method is required for interpreting in a telephone call or videoconference between parties at different sites who do not share the same language, i.e. for interpreter-mediated telephone or videoconference communication. In this setting, the interpreter is either co-located with one of the parties or at a separate site. The latter configuration leads to a three-way telephone or videoconference connection. The method of interpreting required in this setting can be termed teleconference interpreting to cover both telephone and videoconference communication. However, the terms telephone interpreting and videoconference interpreting may also be used here. In relation to sign-language interpreting, the term video relay service is used for this method.

Given the above definitions, the term telephone interpreting emerges as a cover term for remote interpreting via telephone and working in interpreter-mediated telephone calls. However, in this chapter, telephone-based interpreting will be used as a cover term to avoid ambiguity. With regard to videoconferencing and interpreting, the cover for term for remote interpreting via
videoconference and interpreter-mediated videoconferencing will be videoconference-based interpreting.

To return to the difference between remote and teleconference interpreting, it should be noted that these methods or modalities have different underlying motivations, i.e. the use of communication technology to link an interpreter with the primary participants vs. its use to link primary participants at different sites, and that they are not interchangeable. However, both methods overlap to a certain extent, for example in three-way telephone or videoconferences, which can be seen as a combination of remote and teleconference interpreting. Moreover, both share elements of remote working from the interpreter’s point of view. Both methods will therefore be discussed in this chapter.

Although Paneth noted in 1957 – in what is probably the first reference to remote interpreting – that this was “a very neat and obvious use of interpreters” which “might easily be developed further” (Paneth [1957] 2002: 39), the actual development of remote and teleconference interpreting has sparked heated debate among practitioners and interpreting scholars and has raised questions of feasibility and working conditions; but the debate has also been linked to the efficiency of service provision and the sustainability of the interpreting profession. While uptake in traditional conference interpreting has been relatively slow, there is a growing demand for remote and teleconference interpreting in legal, healthcare, business and educational settings, and both methods are used to deliver spoken and sign-language interpreting alike.

**Historical perspectives and developments**

The Australian immigration service is commonly credited with establishing the first service for telephone-based interpreting, the Telephone Interpreting Service (TIS), in 1973. In the US and in most Western European countries, such services have been offered since the 1980s and 1990s respectively (Mikkelson 2003). Today, telephone-based interpreting is the business of large and mostly private operators who act as agencies between clients and interpreters, but some large hospitals have their own in-house telephone interpreter provision (Angelelli 2004). Telephone-based interpreting is mostly carried out in consecutive mode (see Chapter 6 on consecutive interpreting).

Although some telephone interpreting services are now being replaced by videoconference-based interpreting services, telephone-based interpreting is still a growing market which was worth an estimated US$994.18 million worldwide in 2011, compared to US$700 million in 2007, and was expected to grow further by more than 15% per year from 2011 to 2013 (Commonsense Advisory 2011). This is particularly interesting in view of Ozolins’s (2011) observation that telephone interpreting services still rely nearly exclusively on the use of landline phones rather than mobile or internet-based connections due to concerns about line quality and confidentiality. Thus, while the “telephony revolution” has fundamentally changed global business communication, leading to a possible increase in the demand for interpreter-mediated telephone conferences, it does not seem to be the driver of the expansion of remote interpreting by telephone. Ozolins believes that it is the fall in call rates, including long-distance rates, following deregulation that has fostered the expansion of telephone-based interpreting.

Another important factor is demand. Based on an analysis of over 1000 instances of telephone-based interpreting, Rosenberg (2007) showed that at the time of his study, the demand for remote interpreting by telephone mainly arose from migration and associated language policies, and that it was most widely used in healthcare settings while interpreting in three-way telephone conversations was more common in the business world. Rosenberg described interpreting in telephone conversations as less problematic than remote interpreting by telephone, as a three-way
telephone connection puts the primary participants and the interpreter "on an equal footing". However, detailed analyses comparing interpreter-mediated telephone conversations with non-interpreted telephone conversations (Oviatt and Cohen 1992) and face-to-face communication (Wadensjö 1999) identified a number of interactional problems and showed that the interpreters spent considerable effort coordinating the conversation. Rosenberg, in turn, believes that the difficulties of telephone-based interpreting arise more from situational factors and the lack of a shared frame of reference than from inherent difficulties of telephone communication (2007: 75).

While these studies refer to consecutive interpreting, Hornberger et al. (1996) conducted an experimental study comparing remote interpreting via telephone connection using the simultaneous mode (see Chapter 5 on simultaneous interpreting) with consecutive on-site interpreting in doctor-patient conversations and found the remote simultaneous delivery to be more complete and more accurate than the on-site consecutive delivery. The interpreters participating in the study preferred consecutive on-site interpreting but thought that the remote simultaneous delivery would be beneficial for doctors and patients. The doctors and patients preferred the remote option.

Ko (2006) and Lee (2007) draw attention to the working conditions of telephone interpreters arguing that the generally high levels of dissatisfaction associated with telephone interpreting partly stem from the working conditions including low remuneration rather than from the use of the technology as such. Lee also highlights advantages that the respondents in her study reported, especially the anonymity of telephone interpreting. Ko reports that experienced telephone interpreters exhibit more positive views.

With the spread of telephone interpreting, the method has seen improvements in the technology used. While Rosenberg (2007) denounced the inappropriate practice of passing the handset between clients such as a doctor and a patient, to listen to the remotely located interpreter, service users now increasingly make use of speakerphones or dual-headset phones.

Kelly (2008) provides a comprehensive overview of the practicalities of telephone interpreting. She cites a number of advantages especially for interpreters who feel disadvantaged by face-to-face interpreting due to race or disability, and advocates specific protocols and training for telephone interpreting. Overall, Kelly paints a positive picture of telephone interpreting. However, as Ozolins (2011) notes, her description mostly refers to the US, where the size of the market and “the particular situation of having Spanish as a majority minority language” (p. 43) has led to a level of sophistication in terms of technology use and logistics that is unlikely to be found in many other countries.

The development of telephone-based interpreting is closely associated with access to public services and is especially wide-spread in healthcare interpreting (see also section 3.3; see also Chapter 15). By contrast, the development of videoconference-based interpreting was originally driven by the interest of supra-national institutions such as the United Nations and the European Union in this method of delivering interpreting services. The earliest documented experiment was organized by the UNESCO in 1976 to test the use of the Symphonie satellite. The experiment linked the UNESCO headquarters in Paris with a conference centre in Nairobi and involved three different methods: remote interpreting by telephone, remote interpreting by video link and interpreting in a videoconference between Paris and Nairobi, with the interpreters being situated in Paris (UNESCO 1976). Similar experiments were organized by the UN later in the 1970s and 1980s (Viaggio 2011; Mouzourakis 1996). Although reports about these early tests do not always make a clear distinction between remote and teleconference interpreting, they indicate that remote interpreting was perceived to be challenging or unacceptable, while interpreting in a videoconference link seemed more feasible.
It was, however, remote interpreting that the supra-national institutions were most interested in. When videoconferencing over the Integrated Services Digital Network (ISDN), i.e. digital telephone lines, became available in the 1990s, a series of studies into the feasibility of remote interpreting was organized by various institutions, including the European Telecommunications Standard Institute (ETSI) in 1993 (Böcker and Anderson 1993), the European Commission in 1995, 1997 and 2000, the United Nations in 1999 and 2001, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) in collaboration with the École de traduction et d’interprétation (ETI) in 1999 (Moser-Mercer 2003), the European Council in 2001, and the European Parliament in 2001 and 2004.

As reported by Mouzourakis (2006), the studies used a variety of technical conditions. For example, the ETSI and ITU/ETI studies and the first European Commission study used ISDN connections based on H.320, the encoding and transmission standard developed by the ITU for ISDN-based videoconferencing. However, this was found to be unacceptable for simultaneous interpreting, because the sound quality fell short of the ISO 2063 standard for simultaneous interpreting booths. The UN experiments used ISDN connections with non-standard encoding to achieve a better audio signal, and the more recent tests in the European institutions were based on coaxial or fibre optics cable connections to avoid a loss of sound and also image quality. The equipment used also varied widely. According to Mouzourakis the studies revealed a range of physiological and psychological problems which recurred in different technical conditions, so that it would be “difficult to attribute [these problems] solely to a particular technical setup or even to the working conditions provided by a particular organization” (2006: 52). Mouzourakis suggests that the problems are, in the first instance, caused by the overarching condition of remoteness.

The idea of remote interpreting was also met with considerable resistance by professional conference interpreters, most visible in the discourse of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC). In its “Code for the use of new technologies in conference interpretation”, published in 2000, the association warned that “the temptation to divert certain technologies from their primary purpose e.g. by putting interpreters in front of monitors or screens to interpret at a distance a meeting attended by participants assembled in one place (i.e. tele-interpreting), is unacceptable” (AIIC 2000). The updated version of 2012 is unchanged in this respect.

The insight that remote interpreting is challenging regardless of technological improvements was a blow to the institutions which saw remote interpreting as a means of improving interpreter availability, saving interpreter travel time and costs, and from the 1990s onwards, increasingly as a way of meeting the linguistic and logistical challenges entailed by the expansion of the European Union, including the shortage of interpreting booths in meetings rooms (Mouzourakis 2003).

The motivation for the use of videoconference-based interpreting in legal and healthcare settings shares many of these reasons, especially the shortage of qualified interpreters for many of the languages that are required in these settings and the short notice at which many interpreting assignments need to be scheduled. Moreover, the short duration of many legal and healthcare assignments make the interpreter’s travel and physical presence particularly uneconomical. A survey of 200 legal interpreters conducted by Braun and Taylor (2012a) shows a wide variety of attitudes towards videoconference-based interpreting. Although many interpreters perceive the introduction of videoconferencing and interpreting as a cost-cutting exercise, some also have positive views, especially regarding the potential of videoconference technology to improve access to interpreting services and fairness of justice. Moreover, the survey reveals links between the interpreters’ attitudes towards videoconferencing and the situation in the country in which they work, in terms of the quality of the equipment and the general working conditions. This is
similar to the observations made by Ko (2006) and Lee (2007) in relation to telephone-based interpreting.

In the more recent past, encouraged by the European efforts to promote the use of videoconferencing in legal proceedings, many European countries have implemented videoconferencing facilities in courtrooms based on the ITU’s more recent H.323 standard for videoconferences using the internet, which provides better video and audio quality than ISDN-based systems. Together with high-end peripheral equipment such as cameras and microphones, these systems can provide better support for videoconference-based interpreting than older systems. At the same time, the availability of web- or cloud-based videoconference services providing varying and unstable sound and image quality, and access to them on tablets and other mobile devices, especially in healthcare settings, raises new questions about the feasibility of remote interpreting using such systems.

**Current situation, trends and issues**

This section delves more deeply into current practice and research findings in different settings. Section 3.1 specifically addresses the situation in supra-national institutions, focusing on simultaneous conference interpreting in multilingual settings. In accordance with current practice and research in relation to this setting, this section refers mainly to remote interpreting by video link. Section 3.2 outlines the situation with regard to legal interpreting, showing the reasons for the variety of configurations in this field, i.e. the use of both remote and teleconference interpreting, mostly by video link. Section 3.3 then turns to the field of healthcare, where remote interpreting by telephone is the most common method of technology-supported delivery. Section 3.4 gives a brief overview of other settings.

**Supra-national institutions**

As was pointed out above, supra-national institutions have experimented with remote interpreting via video link for some time now, and a number of studies were launched to explore the conditions of interpreting in this setting. While early studies focussed on technical factors, two experimental studies addressed the quality of interpreting and a range of physiological and psychological variables. The ITU/ETI study (Moser-Mercer 2003) included six conference interpreters working from English and Spanish into French, whose performance was sampled over several days of traditional and remote interpreting. The study conducted by the European Parliament in 2004 (reported in Roziner and Shlesinger 2010) included 36 interpreters working in several language combinations whose performance in traditional and remote interpreting was sampled over a period of two weeks. As well as investigating the interpreters’ performance, the two studies also surveyed the interpreters’ emotional responses to remote interpreting, and measured stress indicators and aspects of the working environment.

The performance analysis of the ITU/ETI study revealed, as one of the major differences between on-site and remote interpreting, that the interpreters’ performance in remote interpreting declined faster than their on-site performance, and this was explained by an earlier onset of fatigue in remote interpreting (Moser-Mercer 2003). In the European Parliament study, the comparison of the interpreters’ performance in the two conditions resulted in slightly lower rates for remote interpreting but the difference failed to reach statistical significance, and Roziner and Shlesinger believe that the differences “may be regarded as rather minor in practical terms” (2010: 241).

With regard to stress, the interpreters participating in the ITU/ETI found remote interpreting more stressful, and their stress hormone values were higher in remote interpreting, although
neither difference reached statistical significance (Moser-Mercer 2003). The interpreters participating in the European Parliament study perceived remote interpreting as being significantly more stressful than on-site interpreting, but again no such differences were found in objective measures of stress in this study (Roziner and Shlesinger 2010). In general, the most striking result of these studies seems to be the discrepancy between objective findings and subjective perception. Roziner and Shlesinger conclude for the European Parliament study that “[w]hereas the interpreters themselves were significantly less satisfied with their own performance in RI, the objective judgements of a panel of judges (two for each excerpt), based on 1,059 different judgements, point to almost no decline in quality, with a possible acceleration in the rate of decline, compared with the rate in on-site interpreting” (2010: 242).

A different, more technically-oriented approach was taken by the Interpreting Service of the European Commission (SCIC) in 2010. The aim of a study conducted by the Fraunhofer Institute for the SCIC was to define the minimum quality of digital video and audio sources required to provide on-site and remote simultaneous interpretation. A total of 36 conference interpreters underwent a series of tests in which they rated, for example, different audio and video qualities, albeit without performing any actual interpreting task. The so-called “human factors”, which were found to be important in other studies (see previous paragraph) were not included in this study. The findings resulted in a comprehensive list of technological recommendations for video and audio transmission (see Causo 2012). Whether the use of the equipment recommended in this study will improve the interpreters’ subjective perception of RI during their interpreting task remains to be seen.

Legal settings

As outlined, court services and other legal institutions have turned to videoconferencing as a means to make proceedings more efficient, to minimize security concerns arising from the transport of detained persons and to support cross-border judicial co-operation. In many English-speaking countries, videoconference facilities were implemented in courtrooms, prisons, detention centres and police stations in the 1990s to create “virtual courts”, i.e. links between court rooms and prisons, for example (for an overview see Braun and Taylor 2012b). This development has entailed a demand for videoconference interpreting (as opposed to remote interpreting).

The 2000s saw a worldwide spread of videoconference technology in legal proceedings. In The Netherlands, for example, videoconferencing has been used in pre-trial hearings since 2007, using internet-based equipment (van den Hoogen and van Rotterdam 2012). All courtrooms with videoconferencing facilities have the exact same equipment and layout to facilitate the work of all involved. A similar approach is now taken by other jurisdictions. By contrast, in countries such as the UK, where such equipment was implemented in the era of ISDN-videoconferencing, there are often problems with videoconference interpreting. Fowler (2007) notes problems with the interpreters’ positioning in the courtroom and access to the microphone, as well as visibility of the video image. She argues that these problems, together with the absence of a protocol, lead to frequent disruptions, requests for repetition and misunderstanding.

A comprehensive feasibility study of videoconference interpreting in immigration proceedings was conducted by Ellis (2004). In the examined setting, the immigration judge, the refugee protection officer and the interpreter were together in the immigration office, while the refugee and his/her lawyer were in another city. The findings are based on interviews with 14 immigration lawyers and questionnaire responses from 25 immigration judges, 16 refugee protection officers and 17 interpreters. The lawyers were mostly sceptical about the suitability of video
links, while the other three groups were generally more positive. One of the major problems reported was that the interpreter was not co-located with the refugee, leading to a weaker personal rapport between the interpreter and the refugee, difficulties with the coordination of the communication and the sight translation of documents presented by the refugee, and the impossibility of using whispered interpreting. Judges felt that consecutive interpreting was disruptive, especially when they delivered their final submissions. The hearings by video link also tended to be longer and were considered to be more fatiguing than comparable face-to-face hearings. The interpreters were concerned that body language and emotions were not transmitted efficiently and that this might undermine the refugee’s credibility. The interpreters also felt that videoconference communication involved more repetition and overlapping speech, which was difficult to resolve and impeded accurate interpretation.

A study of immigration bail hearings by video link conducted by two British charities – Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID) and the British Refugee Council – (BID 2008) came to similar conclusions. Three applicants, who were separated from the interpreter and all other participants, felt that they had difficulty following what happened in the courtroom and that only the questions directed towards them and their answers were interpreted; they had problems seeing and hearing the other exchanges in the courtroom.

The General Directors’ Immigration Services Conference (GDISC), an informal network for European collaboration on immigration issues, created an “Interpreters’ pool project” in 2007, which was a Europe-wide initiative to supply interpreters for asylum interviews by way of relay interpreting to overcome problems with interpreter availability, especially for rare languages (GDISC 2007). (For a discussion of relay interpreting, see Chapter 11 on conference interpreting.) The interpreter who speaks the immigration case worker’s language was co-located with the case worker and the applicant. The second interpreter, who speaks the language of the applicant, was located in another country. The project ended in 2012, but it is an example of how the uses of videoconference technology have evolved to go beyond the two basic distinctions between remote and teleconference interpreting.

The most comprehensive study to date relating to videoconference-based interpreting in criminal proceedings was conducted by the European AVIDICUS projects. AVIDICUS 1 (2008–11) assessed the viability and quality of videoconference and remote interpreting in criminal proceedings (Braun and Taylor 2012c). Based on the outcomes of a survey among 200 legal interpreters and 30 legal institutions in Europe, designed to identify the most pressing problems and the most likely settings for videoconference-based interpreting, the project conducted a series of experimental studies to compare the interpreting quality in traditional interpreting and in video links for some of the settings identified in the survey (e.g. police interviews in the UK). The quantitative analysis of the data shows a significantly higher number of interpreting problems and, like Moser-Mercer’s (2003) data, a faster decline of interpreting performance over time in video links, suggesting greater difficulties for interpreters and a faster onset of fatigue, and ultimately a higher cognitive load for the interpreters. This is corroborated by qualitative analyses, which highlight lexical activation problems in the videoconference setting (Braun 2013). They also reveal that many of the problems arising are related. For example, overlapping speech was often followed by omissions. The findings suggest that improvements in videoconference-based interpreting may be achieved through training (e.g. to avoid overlapping speech), and the use of better equipment (e.g. equipment that provides “full-duplex” sound to ensure that voices can be heard clearly even in situations of overlapping speech). However, the data suggests that there are also deeper-rooted behavioural and communication problems which may change the dynamic of legal communication and which warranted further research (Braun and Taylor 2012c; Braun 2013). Based on these findings, the AVIDICUS 1 project developed guidelines of good practice.
for videoconference-based interpreting in criminal proceedings, and designed and piloted training modules for interpreters and legal practitioners. Interestingly, Napier conducted a similar study for sign-language interpreting around the same time and came to very similar results, and presented similar recommendations (Napier 2012).

To follow up further on the potential impact of training and equipment and on the potentially changing communicative dynamics in videoconference-based interpreting, the AVIDICUS 2 project (2011–13) was designed to address two strands of research (Braun and Taylor 2015). The first strand replicated the AVIDICUS 1 studies, involving the same interpreters but providing them with short-term training in videoconference-based interpreting before they participated again. Moreover, better equipment was used. The findings of this research create a complex picture, making it impossible to say without reservation that training, familiarization and the use of better equipment resulted in a clear performance improvement. The second strand of research focussed on the analysis of the communicative dynamic in real-life court hearings that used videoconferencing and interpreting and revealed differences in the dynamics of the communication between traditional and video-mediated settings. Videoconference interpreting in court seems to entail a reduction in the quality of the intersubjective relations between the participants and a greater fragmentation of the discourse. AVIDICUS 3 (2014–16) is currently assessing the implementation of videoconferencing facilities in legal institutions across Europe in terms of their fitness for the purposes of bilingual proceedings and interpreter integration (see www.videoconference-interpreting.net).

While the research conducted in AVIDICUS for the first time also included research into remote interpreting in legal proceedings, the practice of remote interpreting in this field goes back, as pointed out above, to the 1970s. At that time, remote interpreting by telephone was introduced in Australia, followed by the US in the 1980s. The Telephone Interpreting Project of US courts started in 1989 but was never analysed systematically. Over time, remote interpreting over the phone has gradually been replaced by video remote interpreting.

A well-known example of videoconference-based remote interpreting is in the 9th judicial circuit in Florida, which introduced a central interpreter hub in 2007. The interpreter hub is in one of the courthouses and serves all judicial locations that fall under the jurisdiction of the Ninth Judicial Circuit from a single point. The interpreters’ workstations are configured to provide a combination of remote consecutive and simultaneous interpreting (http://www.ninthcircuit.org/programs-services/court-interpreter/centralized-interpreting/). The Metropolitan Police Service in London introduced remote interpreting in August 2011, with interpreters working in consecutive mode from centralized videoconferencing hubs linked to London police stations (personal communication).

Healthcare settings

More homogeneous methods of interpreting are used in healthcare settings than in legal settings. It is mainly remote interpreting that is required, and the interpretation is most frequently delivered by telephone, although the advent of mobile videoconferencing devices is gradually changing this (Locatis et al. 2010). As was pointed out in Section 2, the demand for telephone-based interpreting in healthcare has increased steadily since its introduction in the 1970s. A number of surveys on user satisfaction have been conducted. However, empirical studies of interpreter performance, quality and interaction are largely absent.

An exception is Horberger et al.’s (1996) early study which compared remote simultaneous interpreting with on-site consecutive interpreting. Horberger and his colleagues found the former to be more complete and accurate than the latter, although the use of two different
modes of interpreting may have made the comparison difficult. The findings from the survey-based studies of remote interpreting in medical encounters using telephone and video link are also difficult to compare because of a great variance in the conditions under which they were conducted. In a review of these studies, Azarmina and Wallace conclude, perhaps somewhat optimistically, that “the findings of the selected studies suggest that remote interpretation is at least as acceptable as physically present interpretation to patients, doctors and (to a lesser extent) interpreters themselves” (2005: 144). In spite of the lack of any formal assessment of the interpreters’ performance in the studies referred to, the authors conclude that “[r]emote interpretation appears to be associated with levels of accuracy at least as good as those found in physically present interpretation” (ibid.). They do, however, note that interpreters generally preferred face-to-face interpreting and that they had a preference for video remote interpreting to remote interpreting by telephone. This is corroborated by more recent studies comparing the three methods of delivery. Of the over 200 patients, 24 healthcare providers and seven interpreters surveyed by Locatis et al. (2010), the majority of both providers and interpreters showed the same preferences with regard to the three methods. Patients found no difference between the three modes, but were only subjected to one mode each. The 52 interpreters responding to a survey conducted by Price et al. (2012) in a clinical setting found all three methods satisfactory for conveying information, but less satisfactory for interpersonal aspects of communication. They favoured face-to-face interpreting and found that video remote interpreting presented an improvement to remote interpreting by telephone.

A study on video remote interpreting currently being conducted by the Belgian Ministry of Health takes account of the features of interpreted interaction and intercultural mediation, and makes recommendations for behaviour in such video links. Based on initial results from the pilot, which was conducted in four Belgian hospitals, the study highlights the importance of training, covering equipment use as well as protocol (Verrept 2011).

**Other settings**

The use of remote and teleconference interpreting in business settings is not very well documented, but some reports and the websites of interpreting service providers suggest that all methods of technology-supported interpreting are used across different segments of the commercial interpreting market. There may also be a greater variety of configurations than likely encountered in legal settings. Solutions here tend to be more custom-made to cater to the specific requirements of business clients, and they may combine the use of telephone and videoconferencing for teleconferences with interpreters (Kurz 2002; Selhi 2000).

In the late 1990s, the ViKiS project in Germany investigated the possibility of integrating simultaneous interpreting into a point-to-point videoconference between two clients. As with the studies conducted in supra-national institutions, the project was developed on the back of the then increasing use of ISDN-based videoconferencing, which had made videoconference communication affordable for small and medium enterprises, allowing them to communicate globally. The project designed a solution for integrating an interpreter into a point-to-point videoconference from a third location. Using the ViKiS setup, Braun (2004, 2007) analysed the adaptation of interpreters to this (then) novel working condition. All participants in the study reported that the communication was more fatiguing than face-to-face communication and that it was more difficult to establish a rapport with the other participants. Due to the limitations of ISDN videoconferences, especially the low sound quality, there were also a number of listening comprehension problems which, given the other problems, were difficult to overcome. The one aspect to which interpreters were able to adapt was the interaction. However, the
interpreters felt that they were required to adopt the role of a moderator, which posed a number of ethical problems, and led them to do more coordination than in traditional bilateral interpreting assignments. Different stages of adaptation were identified. The first stage was one of problem discovery and awareness raising, often leading to performance reduction or the use of ad hoc problem solving strategies. With increasing experience, however, the interpreter moved from problems-solving to avoidance and preventative strategies, based on their understanding that the resolution of problems (e.g. turn-taking problems) is often difficult in the videoconference situation (Braun 2004, 2007).

**Recommendations for practice**

AIIC (2000) has provided initial guidelines for the use of remote and teleconference interpreting in the context of conference interpreting, although these have, in part, been superseded by practical realities, for instance, the rejection of remote interpreting. Based on the studies conducted in supra-national institutions, Causo (2012) outlines technical minimum standards for remote conference interpreting by video link. Van den Hoogen and van Rotterdam (2012) describe minimum requirements for the use of videoconferencing in legal proceedings. The AVIDICUS projects have developed comprehensive guidelines for videoconference-based interpreting in legal proceedings (Braun and Taylor 2012c, 2014; www.videoconference-interpreting.net). Napier (2012) presents a set of guidelines for the use of videoconference-based sign-language interpreting in legal proceedings. Kelly (2008) and Rosenberg (2007) suggest protocols and have provided guidelines for telephone-based interpreting. Moreover, some institutions have issued their own practical guidelines for interpreters and staff working in teleconference or videoconference situations.

Given the variation in the use of remote and teleconference interpreting in terms of setting, communication purpose, number and distribution participants, mode of interpreting and other variables, it is difficult to make general recommendations for practice. However, it has become clear that the viability of remote and teleconference interpreting depends on a range of factors, not only on the technical quality of the equipment or the connection. The following points can be used as a general guide for implementing and using teleconference and remote interpreting.

Institutions planning the implementation and use of remote and/or teleconference interpreting facilities should, as a first step, specify whether these facilities are intended for occasional or regular use, and whether they will be employed for a single purpose (e.g. a link between a courtroom and a number of prisons in the vicinity) or whether multiple purposes are possible in the future (e.g. make court–prison video links, as well as connecting an interpreter to a court room). All variables such as number and distribution of participants, especially the possible locations of the interpreter, the main communication needs and the mode of interpreting, should be considered carefully to determine the requirements and the scale of investment. Interpreters should be involved in the planning stages. An incremental introduction of new technology is recommended, i.e. any large-scale purchase, implementation and roll-out of new equipment should be preceded by a pilot phase and adjustments made to the original plans where necessary.

In relation to videoconference-based interpreting, the quality of the equipment and the connection has received much attention. Although it has become clear that some of the main challenges of videoconference-based interpreting occur regardless of the technology used (Moser-Mercer 2005; Mouzourakis 2006; Braun and Taylor 2015), it is also understood that any form of remote or teleconference interpreting should be supported by the best possible equipment and connection to achieve an appropriate quality of service, including clear sound
and image, lip synchronicity and connection stability. AIIC (2000) states that the frequency bandwidth required for remote (simultaneous) conference interpreting is at least 100–12,500 Hz. In the practice of videoconference-based interpreting in legal and healthcare contexts and in telephone-based interpreting, other conditions have been found to be satisfactory, but these methods mainly rely on consecutive interpreting. Sound quality is an issue that is highlighted in almost all studies relating to remote and teleconference interpreting. Full-duplex sound is required, allowing sound from both locations to be transmitted at the same time without the sound “cutting out”.

Causo also highlights further conditions that may have an adverse effect on the sound quality and comprehension of videoconference-based interpreting, emphasizing that “videoconferences are frequently linking standard offices unsuitable for this purpose, or have a poor setup, which means sound reverberation [ … ], simple omnidirectional microphones integrated in the table, etc.” (2012: 229). Rosenberg (2007) and Kelly (2008) make similar points in relation to telephone-based interpreting. They highlight the inappropriateness of using ordinary telephones and speakerphones for remote interpreting. Ordinary telephones force recipients to pass the handset back and forth between them, while speakerphones can elicit too much background noise. To resolve some of these issues, Kelly recommends the use of dual-headset phones.

In videoconference-based interpreting, another question with regard to equipment relates to the number of cameras and screens required. The answer will depend on the setting, i.e. for a small group, it may be sufficient to have one camera and one screen per site to capture and display the image of all participants. The involvement of a larger number of participants, however, requires multiple cameras and multiple screens or a split screen showing the different participants. A separate document camera may also be required so that text, diagrams and images are clearly visible to the interpreter.

The distribution of cameras is also closely related to the visibility of the participants and the interpreter. In remote conference interpreting, it is not normally necessary for the interpreter to be seen by the delegates (an exception is the case of remotely located sign-language interpreters) but in healthcare, legal and business settings, reciprocity of visibility is recommended, i.e. all participants, including the interpreter, see the other participants and are seen by all. The interpreter should also be able to see a small image of him/herself. This image is an important means of monitoring non-verbal communication, allowing this interpreter, for example, to check whether important gestures such as signalling a speaker to stop are visible on screen, although some interpreters report that they feel disconcerted seeing themselves.

Similarly, there is little agreement over how much control the interpreter needs over the equipment. This will again depend on the setting, but in videoconference-based interpreting, interpreters should have a say in the choice of images they see; and in all settings of remote and teleconference interpreting, interpreters should have their own microphone, which they should be able to mute. They should also be able to adjust the volume of the remote speakers.

Such problems also point to wider issues regarding the working environment in remote and teleconference interpreting. In connection with implementing videoconference equipment, it is also necessary to consider the room layout, positioning and seating arrangements for the interpreter and for the other parties. Van den Hoogen and van Rotterdam (2012) suggest, with reference to courtrooms, that the use of a videoconference should not force the participants in the communication to change their normal position. This may not be possible in all situations of teleconference and remote interpreting, but when compromises have to be made, the situation of the interpreter needs careful consideration. Kelly (2008) also highlights the importance of a quiet and undisturbed working environment for the interpreter. She refers to problems that can arise in call centres (or interpreter hubs) where interpreters may disturb each other, as well as problems
caused by background noise when interpreters work from home. Some telephone interpreting providers therefore impose strict requirements on the workspace of interpreters who work from home. Similarly, where necessary, the space in which the interpreters work should be “closed” and/or soundproof where necessary to ensure confidentiality.

One issue for debate is the length of interpreter-mediated encounters that involve the use of communication technology. Given that research shows a faster onset of fatigue in remote interpreting (Braun 2013; Moser-Mercer 2003), an interpreter’s working turn in remote and teleconference interpreting should be shorter than in traditional interpreting. The guidelines issued by the Wisconsin court authorities, for example, recommend a maximum of 15 minutes (http://www.wicourts.gov/services/interpreter/docs/telephoneinterpet.pdf).

Teleconferences and videoconferences require thorough preparation, and any briefing that an interpreter would normally receive should not be omitted because of the use of communication technology. Similarly, institutions using teleconference or videoconference interpreting should develop procedures for deciding whether or not these methods of interpreting are suitable for a particular situation. Interpreters should be consulted where necessary. Furthermore, testing of the connections between the locations is crucial, especially when the equipment is used only occasionally.

Given the many challenges of remote and teleconference interpreting, interpreters and the users of interpreting services should be trained to work with interpreters in situations of remote or teleconference interpreting. The extent of the training required is not yet clear, but recent research in a legal setting suggests that short-term training may not be able to solve all problems (Braun and Taylor 2015).

**Future directions**

To date there is no consensus about the quality of interpreting that can be achieved in remote and teleconference interpreting compared to the quality of traditional interpreting in comparable situations, and what exactly the relevant shaping forces are. The variation in settings, requirements for quality and research methods means that the findings from different fields of interpreting are difficult to compare. One of the most pressing questions for future research is to resolve apparent discrepancies in current research findings (see Section 3). Moser-Mercer (2005) and Mouzourakis (2006) suggested that the condition of remoteness or the lack of “presence” may be the most likely common denominator for the problems with remote interpreting. The concept of “presence” and its effects are issues that will require a substantial amount of further research.

Furthermore, Moser-Mercer (2005) has raised questions about adaptation of interpreters to remote interpreting, arguing that experienced interpreters may find it more difficult to adapt to the conditions of remote interpreting because they rely on automated processes, while novice interpreters, especially when they are subjected to new methods of interpreting during their training, may have a greater potential for adaptation. Braun (2004, 2007) discusses adaptation in three-way videoconferences and reveals a number of limits of successful adaptation, leading to a reduction in performance. At the same time, the interpreters who took part in experiments with remote conference interpreting were able to maintain their performance, although not for as long as in traditional interpreting (onset of fatigue). Roziner and Shlesinger (2010) argue that the maintenance of the performance quality over at least a certain period of time comes at a price, i.e. that interpreters put more effort into the interpreting task and may suffer post-work exhaustion. The issue of adaptation also requires further investigation.

A related consideration is how the physical separation and distribution of all participants and their perception of the situation via telephone lines and/or video screens affects aspects such as
the processing of information, the communicative behaviour of the primary participants and the communicative dynamic. Moser-Mercer (2005) outlines problems with multi-sensory integration in videoconferences, which she believes prevent interpreters from processing the information and building mental representations of the situation in the usual way. Licoppe and Verdier (2015) suggest that distributed courtrooms change the dynamic of the communication and lead to fragmentation of the communication. The sources and implications of this kind of fragmentation are not very well understood yet and warrant further study.

In relation to these questions it will be necessary to investigate the possible short-term and long-term effects of remote and teleconference interpreting on the interpreters, on the success of the communicative event as a whole and on important societal issues such as the quality and fairness of justice. Research needs to highlight the possible correlations between variables in order to show how the likely increase in remote and teleconference interpreting, the further ‘industrialization’ of interpreters associated with this and the expectation that they are available ‘at the push of a button’ impacts on the interpreters’ working conditions, their status and remuneration. It will also be necessary to highlight the potential links between this and interpreting quality.

Given the speed with which communication technologies develop and spread, the future is likely to bring an increase and diversification of teleconference and remote interpreting. The latest developments which are likely to be relevant for remote interpreting fall into two categories, i.e. high-end solutions such as videoconferencing systems (HD and 3D “tele-presence” or “immersive” systems) and the merger of videoconferencing with 3D virtual reality technology to create “augmented reality” communication solutions and low-end solutions such as web-based videoconferencing services which were originally developed for the home market (e.g. Skype), and video calls using mobile devices and apps. It will be important to investigate how the virtual spaces that these technologies create are able to support the development of ‘presence’ and the dynamic of the communication. Robust research methods are required to cover the potential impact of emerging technologies on interpreting.

Legislative frameworks are likely to change and become more accommodating of remote work. One recent example is the European Directive 2010/64/EU on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings, which highlights the need for quality in legal translation and interpreting in Europe and explicitly refers to the possibility of using communication technologies such as telephony and videoconference to gain access to an interpreter. This is likely to lead to an increased demand for remote interpreting in many European countries.

A crucial point for research and practice is collaboration. Assuming that technologies are here to stay and that it would be a mistake to dismiss them cursorily, given their advantages, it will be important that the main stakeholders, i.e. interpreter associations, interpreting service providers, users of interpreting services, representatives of client groups (especially in public service interpreting contexts) and researchers collaborate in the investigation and mitigation of the risks and challenges of remote and teleconference interpreting and in designing, implementing and piloting appropriate solutions.

Given the insights into adaptability and its limitations, training of interpreters and those who use their services is crucial (and the influence of training is another topic for research, see Braun and Taylor 2015). European conference interpreter training courses, in collaboration with the interpreting services of the European Commission and the European Parliament, have used videoconferencing for simulations of interpreting for several years now (virtual classes). Hlavac (2013) points to the need to train and test future interpreters in their knowledge about remote interpreting. The European project IVY (Interpreting in Virtual Reality) and its follow-up project EVIVA (www.virtual-interpreting.net) evaluate different technological solutions,
including videoconferencing and 3D virtual worlds, for the simulation of interpreting practice to train interpreters and their clients. Chen and Ko (2010), as well as the European QUALITAS project (www.qualitas-project.eu), which develops certification procedures for legal interpreters, have explored possibilities for remote testing of interpreters.

**Further reading**


This article provides a qualitative and quantitative analysis of interpreting quality in on-site and videoconference-based remote interpreting in the legal setting, drawing on police interviews as a source of data and discussing the implications for practice and research.


This volume covers different configurations of videoconference-based interpreting in legal proceedings. It gives an overview of current practice and research, and presents research findings, suggestions for training and recommendations for best practice. It is of interest to interpreters, educators, students and legal professionals.


This monograph provides an overview of the growing field of remote interpreting via telephone covering healthcare, legal and other settings. The book offers information for practising and trainee interpreters, educators and users of telephone interpreting services.


This article considers telephone-based interpreting in the context of changing technology. Based on a review of previous studies into different configurations of telephone-based interpreting, it identifies future research needs including research into practical issues such as the setup of, and the coordination of interaction in telephone interpreting.


This article discusses the aims, methods, conclusions and recommendations of the large-scale study into videoconference-based remote interpreting conducted in the European Parliament in 2005 and compares the findings this study to those of other studies into remote conference interpreting.

**References**


Remote interpreting


Introduction

Interpretation quality is a key concept in interpreting studies. Since the earliest studies, quality has been approached from different perspectives, although there is not yet a universal consensus on what it is, what criteria should be used to define it, and how these criteria can be objectively evaluated. It is therefore difficult to arrive at a single, comprehensive definition of the concept of “quality” in the field of interpreting (Shlesinger 1997: 122), and many authors have referred to it as a slippery concept (e.g., Ackermann et al. 1997; Shlesinger 1997). Contributing to the difficulty of defining quality is the fact that one must take into account a number of very disparate aspects involving various actors – interpreters, clients, users and speakers – each of whom has quite a different vision and perception of quality (Garzone 2003: 23).

Nevertheless, we can consider research on interpretation quality to be one of the most fruitful and cohesive areas of inquiry if we take into account the large number of empirical studies carried out since the 1980s on this topic (Bühler 1986; Kurz 1989, 1993; Gile 1990; among others) and the continuity and respect for the work that they exhibit. As a result, this research is a model of scientific construction (Gile 2000: 305), and it has opened up a variety of avenues that reveal the multifaceted, complex and dynamic nature of interpretation quality.

In this chapter we will attempt to present the different perspectives that have emerged. In the first part we will introduce the concept and definition of quality, as well as the characteristics that distinguish it from related concepts. Then we will describe the basic parameters that define the quality of an interpretation. In the following two sections, we will trace the history of quality studies to the present date, with reference to the most significant scientific achievements. Finally, we will identify the most important conclusions that can be drawn from this historical analysis.

Concept and definition of quality

In view of the large number of actors and variables involved in the definition, achievement and evaluation of quality in interpreting, as well as the different perspectives that can be adopted (Gile 2003: 111ff), we must develop a concept of quality that can apply to all the different actors involved in the interpreting process, answering the question “what quality, for whom?” (Pöchhacker 1994). Quality, therefore, can be evaluated from different perspectives – that of
interpreters, employers, users, intermediaries and trainers – as a function of the purpose of the communication (Moser-Mercer 1996: 46), and basically the evaluation of this quality can be approached in two different ways: based on standards imposed by interpreters themselves, or based on the opinions, needs and expectations of users (Moser 1995).

Although the principal objective of interpreting is still to meet the needs of those to whom the interpreting service is being provided, the quality expectations of the different participants, especially the users, cannot under any circumstances be seen as the only valid criterion for defining the quality of the message transfer (Gile 1995a). However, the interrelationship of these actors and each one’s contribution to the notion of quality could contribute to reaching a consensus that could ultimately be expressed in concrete interpreting acts. In this regard, it is necessary to differentiate concepts that are sometimes treated as equivalents, thereby creating a certain amount of conceptual confusion. This differentiation should include, as a minimum, the notions of ideal quality, optimum quality, expectations, success and evaluation (Collados Aís 1998).

Ideal quality refers to the hypothetical perfect interpretation (Altman 1994), which could, at least, serve as a baseline for measuring quality. This hypothetical interpretation would contain all the criteria or parameters that affect quality, with the exception of the conditioning factors that a real-world interpretation might be subjected to in specific situations (which are not quality parameters but justifications for a possible erosion of quality). In this connection, Pöchhacker (1994: 242) proposes a dynamic notion of the concept, “quality under the circumstances,” and notes that quality should be studied in context, taking into consideration all the situational variables that come into play and that have an impact on the interpreter’s performance. Thus, the ideal interpreter would be one who provides an interpretation that is appropriate for a specific context and purpose (Bühler 1986: 233). Therefore, quality is not an unconditional standard that can be met at any time under any circumstances. Rather, the interpreter must reconcile the expectations and demands of often heterogeneous groups and establish priorities in the selection of one or more objectives: fidelity or intelligibility, correct language usage or precision, elegant style or complete transmission of the message (Kalina 2005: 772). Thus, the concept of optimum quality is introduced for a given set of situational conditions (Moser-Mercer 1996: 44).

On the other hand, the success or failure of the interpretation is not intrinsically related to quality (Gile 1990, 1991), since failure does not necessarily equate to deficient quality, nor does success guarantee that the interpreter has given a quality performance. The perception and evaluation of quality often depend on the subjective judgment of the evaluator according to the situation and the premises, without anyone knowing necessarily what a good interpretation is (Cartellieri 1983).

The definitions of quality devised by interpreting theorists take the most objective approach to the subject, as Pöchhacker (1994) states. All agree on the criteria that should be applied (Gile 1990, 1995b; Pöchhacker 1994), although they ignore or are ambiguous about the role of each criterion in the delineation of the concept of quality. Gile (1995a: 40) contends that to have a more concrete grasp of quality we must necessarily define the role of the interpreter:

[ ... ] criteria of quality and actual quality assessment by the various participants in communication may depend to a significant extent on the definition of the Translator’s role as the Sender’s alter ego, or as a facilitator of communication working for the Receiver or the Client.

Users apparently tend to favor a “ghost role” for the interpreter, although they would allow “some intruder operations” such as additional explanations and corrections (Kopczyński 1994).
Tripepi Winteringham (2012) has investigated the interpreter’s role and responsibility in both simultaneous interpreting and liaison interpreting (see Chapter 13 on Community Interpreting in this volume) in various contexts (medical, technical and economic) with users who are non-native speakers of English. Her study examines the factors that help make the interpreter a communication facilitator, not only by providing an accurate interpretation but also by meeting the clients’ expectations. However, the concept of quality is not just determined by the role played by the interpreter. It also depends on the modalities and the situational elements that provide a frame of reference for evaluation or standards that affect the interpretation (Salevsky 1992: 85–118) and the interpreter’s working conditions as well. Although some authors argue that the interpreter is the only guarantor of quality, since responsibility for the final result of the interpretation falls on the interpreter’s shoulders alone (e.g., Garzone 2003), others believe that only collaboration among all actors involved guarantees the quality of the result (e.g., Kalina 2005).

Finally, if we consider interpreting to be a service that facilitates comprehension of a message expressed in another language, it is logical to assume that the activity is governed by rules, and that these rules are part of the definition of quality. Hardly any attention was given to the rules governing the interpreting process until Shlesinger (1989) and Harris (1990) addressed the issue. Shlesinger (1989) set out her doubts about the way to elicit norms in the context of conference interpreting and whether these norms do operate in the professional environment. The fact that interpreter training programs were concentrated in a few institutions led her to acknowledge that they can contribute to the consistent transmission of norms and, in consequence, to accept that these norms may govern interpreter behavior, despite the difficulties in eliciting them. Harris (1990) underlined the variability of norms depending on the interpreting setting. The only norm that rules every interpreting performance is that of acting “as a honest spokesperson” (ibid.: 115):

Interpreters – speaking on behalf of others – have to re-express the original speaker’s ideas and the manner of expressing them as accurately as possible, without significant omissions, and without conflating them with their own ideas and expressions.

More recently, it has been assumed that rules play an important role in the process and product of interpretation, and it has been demonstrated that there is a link between the rules and the communicative context. Shlesinger (1989: 112) points out that definitions of quality tend to reflect some of the rules internalized by interpreters, even if they do not agree among themselves on the definition of a quality interpretation. The rules tend to be implicit, and they form the basis of the ethical codes and professional standards adopted by interpreter associations such as the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) (see Chapters 2 and 19 for further discussion) and international organizations such as the Directorate General for Interpretation (SCIC) [of the European Union]. Some standard-setting bodies have also developed standards for interpreting: UNI 10547:1996 (Italy), ÖNORM D 1200:2000 and D 1201:2000 (Austria), Taalmerk Standard (the Netherlands) and ASTM F2089-01:2007 (United States). It is surprising to note, however, that Standard EN 15038, published in 2006 by the European Committee for Standards, defines the quality of translation only, establishing normative processes that apply only to that type of service and not interpreting. Moreover, standards can vary as the profession evolves, and as a function of the type of market, the type or modality of interpreting, and even the individual interpreter. This is because quality standards must be adapted to the specific interpreting situation and the limitations imposed by it (Straniero Sergio 2003: 171f).
Quality criteria

Optimum interpreting quality could be understood as the weighted sum of informative fidelity and presentation as a function of the nature of the message and the situation (Gile 1983). Nonetheless, there is no agreement about what weight should be attributed to each of the parameters that make up the concept of quality:

We seem to know what the product should be like, but we are less sure about a method for establishing what a particular product is like in a given situation. Quite obviously, researchers, teachers and trainees need a method for looking at the product.

(Pöchhacker 1994: 235)

Expectations are a reflection of the needs established a priori by the agents involved in the interpreting process, either in general or in specific situations. These expectations provide information about how users and other agents who fundamentally contribute to the definition of the concepts of ideal and optimum quality establish and consciously prioritize their needs.

In 1986, Bühler established an initial catalog of parameters in which she proposed criteria that could influence the quality of an interpretation. She then used them in a survey of user expectations and needs. These parameters included the following: native accent, pleasant voice, fluency of delivery, logical cohesion of utterance, sense consistency with original message, completeness of interpretation, correct grammatical usage, use of correct terminology, use of appropriate style, pleasant appearance and reliability. Many subsequent studies of either expectations or assessment have used this catalog as a reference point and then added or eliminated elements that did not seem relevant to the purpose of the study. Among the parameters added to the original group are, for example, intonation and diction, while others, such as pleasant appearance, have been sidelined. The fact that research has been mainly focused on simultaneous interpreting determined the introduction of non-verbal criteria that could be affected by the particular demand of efforts of these technique, and the removal of those aspects that do not play an important role in this setting due to the “invisibility” of the interpreter.

Since then, a number of researchers have emphasized the need for a more precise definition of quality parameters (Mack and Cattaruzza 1995; Vuorikoski 1998; Pradas Macías 2003), and the evidence that some of them are difficult for research subjects to understand (Collados Aís et al. 2007). Indeed, the definition of interpreting quality necessarily includes the definition of the parameters that it comprises (Pradas Macías 2003), although it has also been noted that any attempt at definition is inherently variable (Garzone 2002: 115).

From the beginning, studies of communication considered voice and intonation to be basic elements required for quality interaction. In interpreting as well, from an intuitive point of view, the influence of these aspects on users’ perception of the quality of an interpretation was emphasized. However, the study of non-verbal elements was generally given less attention, possibly because such features were so difficult to analyze. Advances in the science of acoustics and in the analysis of the functions, correlations and perceptions of voice quality have confirmed these intuitive judgments and have provided useful tools for research. The importance of voice and intonation in the evaluation of professional performance has become evident, and objective rules have been devised for obtaining and evaluating data on these factors in order to eliminate subjectivity. These rules refer specifically to aspects related to fundamental frequency, volume and speed of delivery.

From non-verbal vocal parameters, one can draw deductions about the speaker’s geographic or social origin, emotion or state of mind, personality, competence or credibility, and these...
deductions largely determine later judgments. These attributes fall within the category of unconscious evaluations that predetermine subsequent consciously-reasoned evaluations. With respect to interpreting quality, it is the consideration of these factors that explains the different weights given to the parameters as we develop a theoretical definition of what quality is and what we perceive as a quality interpretation. The importance of intonation in conveying verbal content should also be stressed, as it could make comprehension easier or more difficult. Thus, a clear link can be established between non-verbal parameters and other verbal parameters, especially cohesion and accurate transfer of the message.

In the case of fluency, the mere fact that it is frequently used as a synonym for good interpreting highlights its importance as a non-verbal parameter of interpreting quality. It is understood as general ability or as a formal characteristic of oral discourse, and analysis of fluency is closely related to the speed of delivery, pauses and different types of interruptions (stuttering, self-corrections, false starts). From the standpoint of interpreting quality, this parameter is also interrelated with others such as intonation or logical cohesion.

Possibly one of the most controversial parameters of quality is accent. For a long time there was a clear division between theorists who defended its inclusion as a basic component of quality, supported by professional interpreter associations and international organizations, and those who attributed less importance to it as an element of quality. It is related to features such as intelligibility, deviation or unpleasantness, and it has been associated with other parameters such as grammaticality, intonation, fluency and diction. The latter, diction, has not been given priority in studies of quality, perhaps because it was taken as a given in this context. However, its importance in maximizing the interpreter’s articulateness has been demonstrated in evaluations of quality, especially when there are circumstances that hinder it, such as fatigue. Poor diction can affect the receiver’s comprehension, communication, and in general the assessment of the interpretation. Moreover, there appear to be interactions between diction and other non-verbal parameters, such as voice, accent, fluency or intonation, and the complete rendering of the message.

Like diction, style is one of the parameters that has received the least attention in studies of interpreting quality, perhaps because of the oral nature of the context. Although it tends to be placed in the category of verbal parameters, there is no unanimity on this point. Other disciplines, such as translation, emphasize its link to the accurate transfer of meaning. It is also interrelated with the parameter of terminology. Because many interpreted speeches are specialized in their content focus, terminology plays a fundamental role in the concept of quality, and it interacts with other parameters, especially the accurate transfer of meaning and cohesion. Interpreting researchers do not appear to agree on the conceptualization of this parameter, nor do users seem to have uniform expectations. In any event, style always ranks high in the priorities identified by users.

Cohesion is the verbal parameter par excellence, whose importance is emphasized in all studies of interpreting quality and listener expectations. It is no surprise, therefore, that practically all empirical studies on quality have analyzed this parameter. The lack of cohesion in a speech can easily prevent the listener from understanding its content. In any case, the interactions observed between cohesion and accuracy and intonation are one more indication of the link between verbal and non-verbal parameters.

Although, traditionally, a clear distinction has been drawn between accuracy and completeness of message transfer, in practice isolating the two parameters is complicated. Therefore, they should be combined in a broader concept called meaning transfer. The unique characteristics of interpreting, the time factor and the strategies employed by interpreting require that notions from other disciplines be adapted for studying interpreting. Consequently, concepts such as
equivalence (dynamic or functional) cannot be transferred wholesale from translation. There are other labels for this parameter, such as fidelity or faithfulness, but they should not be understood narrowly as fidelity or loyalty to the speaker and the original speech. It should be noted that the analysis of meaning transfer of the message in a specific interpretation is considered to be more objective than that of any non-verbal parameter, although various studies have revealed the difficulties inherent in this analysis on the basis of the original speech, not only for the user but also for the researcher (Gile 1995b, 1999).

**Historical perspectives/developments**

Interpreting quality research has taken place from two quite different perspectives: on the one hand, studies focusing on the relationship between the characteristics of interpreting and subjects’ perception (interpretation as product); and on the other hand, studies focusing on the relationship between the original speech, the interpreted version and the circumstances under which the interpreting is done (interpretation as process).

Users’ perception of quality can be a useful tool for investigating their level of satisfaction and the extent to which their needs are met in the interpreters’ performance, but another type of study should be undertaken to approach quality from the perspective of the interpreting process. Gile (1988: 15ff) offers a vision of quality as process when he defines it as the optimum balance between the different efforts required by the interpreting process (listening, memory and production). He argues that quality deteriorates when capacity is overloaded in one of these areas, as evidenced in either information loss or language deficiencies, or even a lack of clarity or coherence in the interpretation.

In the earliest studies of interpreting, psychologists conducted the first experiments on the effect of factors such as information density in the speech (Treisman 1965), speed of delivery (Gerver [1969] 2002) or availability of background material (Anderson [1979] 1994) on the interpreting process. In what could be considered the seminal work on quality as product, Barik (1971, 1972, 1973) studied interpreting quality in terms of three types of errors (omissions, additions and substitutions) in a quantitative approach focusing on the cognitive processes involved in simultaneous interpreting and a comparative analysis of linguistic features. Serious questions were raised about the validity of these studies because of the limitations of their design: the methodology used did not take into account fundamental aspects of actual interpreting conditions, and quality was measured only as a function of the appearance of that type of deficiency, which could not always be confirmed as such.

Over time, the methodology used in these studies was refined, and as professional interpreters began conducting this type of research, pragmatic and contextual aspects of the interpreting process were included. As a result, quality has been studied from a much broader perspective. Thus, possible problem triggers in the original speech have been identified (Gile 1995a), and it has been shown that the conditions under which the interpreting is performed can affect its quality, revealing the importance of factors such as visual contact (Balzani 1988), length of turns in the booth (Moser-Mercer, Künzli and Korac 1998) or the availability of the original text (Lamberger-Felber 1998, 2001).

From the middle of the 1980s to the dawn of the twenty-first century, research on interpreting quality as product centered on the analysis of expectations and evaluations by subjects. During the initial years, three fundamental questions were asked: (a) Do all subjects share the same expectations of interpreting quality? (b) What is the real weight of the quality parameters in the overall assessment of an interpretation? (c) Who should evaluate the quality of an interpretation?
Bühler (1986) conducted the first empirical study of quality as product with an examination of expectations. She administered a questionnaire to a group of interpreters, who rated the importance of the sixteen proposed criteria. Following a similar methodology, Kurz (1989, 1993) introduced a new aspect in the research, one which would be explored later by Kopczyński (1994), Kurz and Pöchhacker (1995) and Moser (1995): different types of subjects could have different expectations. In this way, the opinions of actual users of interpreting services were also polled. Results revealed a quite steady pattern of preferences as subjects give much more importance to content-related criteria than to form-related ones. During this first stage, other elements that could affect interpreting quality were also studied, such as irritating features (Meak 1990), gender differences (Ng 1992), the role of the interpreter (Marrone 1993; Kopczyński 1994), user attitudes towards simultaneous interpreting (Vuorikoski 1993), the role of the user (Kopczyński 1994; Moser 1995) or prior experience with simultaneous interpreting (Mack and Cattaruzza 1995).

For instance, subjects participating in Meak’s (1990) study showed a higher threshold of tolerance for terminological errors than for deficiencies in the interpreter’s previous knowledge about the conference topic. Ng (1992) revealed gender differences when assessing different aspects of the interpreter’s performance: females seem to be more sensitive to grammatical mistakes and to the inappropriate use of speech levels, while males pay more attention to word usage and, above all, to fluency of delivery. The work of Kopczyński (1994) reported different preferences according to the role of the subject in the interpreting situation: speakers tended to assign more importance to content-related aspects and recipients also prioritized form-related parameters in their rankings.

International organizations have also been concerned about interpreting quality, and they have undertaken projects such as the analysis of user expectations in meetings at which AIIC provided services (Moser 1995) or of aspects including information transfer, terminology, vocal expression and professionalism on the part of interpreters at the headquarters of the SCIC (Doerflinger 2003).

In addition, studies of expectations have been carried out in other settings, such as community interpreting, to survey the opinions of different stakeholders with respect to factors such as knowledge of both languages and specific cultural features, ethical criteria in the profession and the role of the interpreter (Hearn et al. 1981 cited by Pöchhacker 2001). The latter issue has been especially important in community interpreting because of the mediation that is often needed in these interactions, and it has been examined in various interpreting settings such as health care (e.g., Mesa 1997; Pöchhacker 2000) and court interpreting (e.g., Kadic 2000) (see also Chapters 12–15 in this volume).

Traditionally, the results of these studies have been analyzed by dividing the parameters into two groups: verbal and non-verbal, those related to content and those related to form. In the majority of expectation studies, sense consistency ranks first in subjects’ preferences, regardless of whether it is interpreters, users or employers who are responding to the questionnaire. Among users, there is greater variability of opinions, although sense consistency is the parameter most often ranked first among their priorities. Other parameters preferred by users include terminology (Kurz 1993; Mack and Cattaruzza 1995) and detailed reproduction of the content (Kopczyński 1994). Employers, on the other hand, rank the parameters in an order similar to that of interpreters (sense consistency and logical cohesion are rated the most important quality criteria), although interpreters are more demanding with quality criteria than users and employers.

Collados Aís et al. (2007: 215) proposed a categorization based on the classifications used in the majority of studies, establishing four blocks of priorities in expectations:
In other words, subjects attribute more *a priori* importance to factors related to content and message fidelity than to those related to form. Of the list of delivery aspects, fluency is the parameter that tends to receive the greatest attention from subjects (Vuorikoski 1993; Kopczyński 1994; Kurz and Pöchhacker 1995).

In research on community interpreting, providers of this type of service identify comprehension of the language used by clients, confidentiality and fidelity as some of the most important elements (Mesa 1997). In health care, neutrality and confidentiality are revealed as fundamental criteria (Pöchhacker 2000), whereas in the judiciary, interpreting skills and linguistic and cultural competence are subjects’ top priorities (Kadric 2000). In general, the court interpreter is expected to maintain the register, style and tone of the original (Mikkelsen 1998).

Gile (1990) was the first to conduct an empirical study of quality assessment in a questionnaire administered to attendees at a conference. They were asked to rate different aspects of the interpretation they had just heard: overall quality and linguistic, terminological, semantic and formal factors. He then analyzed the effect of the different evaluation criteria on users’ overall assessment of the interpretation. Results revealed that subjects assessed quite homogeneously the overall quality of the performance, as well as the other factors with the exception of voice-related criteria. Five years later, in another study of interpreting evaluations, this time consecutive interpreting, he showed that a group of interpreting students in the French-English combination could not be considered good judges of faithfulness to the original meaning (Gile 1995b), even though they had less limited access to the original speech than the real users of the interpretation as they are supposed to have a good command of both languages.

Studies of evaluation highlight the diversity of subjects’ opinions regarding the different quality parameters, which appear to be dependent not only on their area of specialization or profession, but also on other aspects such as their nationality (for example Gile 1990), gender, culture or language pairs (Ng 1992). All these elements could determine subjects’ expectations and, therefore, condition their perceptual standards and assessment.

The line of research initiated by Collados Aís (1998) proposed the study of quality based on one of its parameters, intonation, and she performed her research in an experimental situation. The results of this research show that users attribute less importance to non-verbal parameters, like intonation, in their expectations, such that the real impact of this type of element on the evaluation of a specific interpretation is not consistent. The study also revealed the limited capacity to evaluate quality not only on the part of users, but also by interpreters themselves. Both groups appeared to pay more attention to non-verbal aspects of the interpretation, although the users were more forgiving in their overall assessment and in the evaluation of all quality parameters. This contrast between expectations and assessment was also confirmed in more recent studies in this area (e.g., Garzone 2003; Pradas Macías 2003; Collados Aís et al. 2007), in which subjects assign less importance to formal parameters in their expectations than the parameter’s real impact on the assessment of a given interpretation.

Studies of the evaluation of community interpreting have been conducted among interpreters and clients, positing criteria such as comprehensibility of the product, accuracy or impartiality (Garber and Mauffette-Leenders 1997), as well as the degree to which expectations were met (Mesa 1997). Some of these criteria were also proposed for the evaluation of sign language interpreting quality. Thus, in the research carried out by Strong and Fritsch-Rudser (1992), two
groups of subjects (hearing and deaf) evaluated aspects such as the interpreters’ language proficiency, the overall quality of their work and their comprehensibility. Results showed that rater agreement was high and emphasized the importance of subjects’ perceptual standards for the study of interpreting quality assessment. The experimental method has also been used to examine quality in court interpreting, in a study that looked at the impact of style on the perception of credibility (Berk-Seligson 1988).

**Current trends and issues**

Interpreting research was characterized, until relatively recently, by the individual nature of the studies. Possibly one of the most noteworthy trends in the last few years has been the creation of research teams with a broader range, and even the beginnings of cross-border collaboration. As a result, research has expanded in scope and has set more ambitious objectives (e.g., the ECIS, EPIC and QuaSI projects, at the University of Granada, the University of Trieste and the University of Vienna, respectively).

In the middle of the 1990s there was a rebirth of experimental methodologies in interpreting quality research. Since that time, the questionnaire (the most frequently used instrument) has coexisted with more sophisticated methodologies and with the application of tools from the social sciences. A wide variety of methodologies are applied, ranging from surveys to corpus studies and including experimentation and the organization of discussion groups. Research on interpreting quality as product in the early part of the twenty-first century involved not only purely linguistic aspects, but also pragmatic and communicative ones. At present, interdisciplinarity is a hallmark of interpreting quality studies that has made possible, among other things, the application of different methodologies to the analysis of the dynamic notion of *quality under the circumstances*. All of this has made it possible to delve deeper into aspects that would have been difficult to analyze using quantitative methods alone. Moreover, the experimentation has focused not just on the process, but has analyzed the product as well in an effort to determine the specific weight that different parameters or factors have in the final perception of the quality of the interpretation.

In addition, towards the end of the twentieth century a new line of research has opened up, using experiments to create a controlled interpreting environment so that specific aspects of an interpretation and the evaluation of it by subjects could be examined (Collados Aís 1998). Over the last decade, this approach has been explored both for studying a specific parameter and for analyzing other kinds of factors that could affect the perception of quality (e.g., Garzone 2003; Pradas Macías 2003; García Becerra 2006; Collados Aís *et al.* 2007; Holub 2010; Rennert 2010), thereby refining the research methodology and opening up new possibilities for manipulating parameters.

In recent years, a variety of studies have also been carried out to identify users’ perceptual standards, elements that could enhance or undermine the quality of the interpreter’s work, and possible interactions among different parameters. In light of the apparent contradiction between expectations and evaluation in previous works, vertical studies of the parameters have been undertaken (Pradas Macías 2003, 2006; Ahrens 2005; Collados Aís *et al.* 2007; Collados Aís *et al.* 2011), scrutinizing and isolating each criterion so that its components can be examined and its specific weight in the perception of quality can be analyzed. Researchers conducting this type of study have manipulated the parameters to explore their impact on the evaluation of interpreting quality, first providing instructions to the interpreter (e.g., Collados Aís 1998; Pradas Macías 2003) and then introducing the manipulation with computer tools (e.g., Holub 2010; Rennert 2010). Other studies in this category have analyzed corpora of actual interpretations (e.g., Ahrens 2005).
During this time, comprehension of the interpretation has been introduced as an element that could affect quality (Holub 2010; Rennert 2010; Cheung 2013), and other aspects have been explored with a view to shedding more light on quality, such as the influence of English as a lingua franca on the effectiveness of the interpretation (Reithofer 2013), the application of speech acts theories as a new way of studying quality evaluation (Vuorikoski 2012), the impact of the social dimension on the actors in the interpreting process with an analysis of elements such as first impressions of the interpreters (García Becerra 2012), the activation of stereotypes (Cheung 2013), the integration of knowledge about communication in the analysis of interpreting evaluation (Behr 2013), the effect of interpreting directionality on the final product (Opdenhoff 2013) and of the order in which interpretations are heard (Rožić 2004; García Becerra 2006, 2012; Collados Aís 2008), among other studies.

Research has also continued on expectations, looking at differences among subject types and expanding the scope to include additional scenarios such as relay interpreting (Waliczek 2003) or film interpreting (Russo 2005). With the incorporation of new technologies, researchers have also discovered that the Internet can be a very useful tool for distributing questionnaires. Chiaro and Nocella (2004) were pioneers in the use of this tool for administering a questionnaire on expectations through the Web to interpreters located all over the world. Following this research method, Zwischenberger and Pöchhacker (2010) surveyed the expectations and opinions of AIIC interpreters regarding the role of the interpreter and a sample of manipulated simultaneous interpretation, and García Becerra (2012) began investigating the use of social networks as a means of administering questionnaires.

In the past decade, interpreting quality research has expanded into the media as well, exploring the parameters of quality in this context (Pignataro and Velardi 2013), looking into aspects of cohesion and coherence in dialog interpreting (Straniero Sergio 2012; Dal Fovo 2013) and examining meaning transfer in consecutive interpreting (Guo 2013). In addition, advances in technology and the specific needs of multilingual settings have promoted the use of remote interpreting, giving rise to a number of studies, such as that of Roziner and Shlesinger (2010). In their research, which involved a large-scale experiment to assess the flexibility and implications of remote interpreting in the European Parliament and in similar bodies, they found that this mode of interpreting has hardly any effect on quality.

And finally, in the area of court interpreting, Lee (2009) surveyed users and interpreters in Australia to explore their opinions on the role of the court interpreter and the quality of that type of service, revealing a gap between the two groups’ perceptions. In the view of Ng (2009), the court interpreter faces the dilemma of balancing adequacy and acceptability in producing an interpretation.

**Conclusions**

The results obtained from research on interpreting quality emphasize the difficulties involved in developing a uniform concept of quality. Nevertheless, the results do enable us to gain a better understanding of this dynamic, complex and multifaceted concept.

One of the most significant results is that, despite what various studies of expectations continue to show (e.g., Waliczek 2003; Chiaro and Nocella 2004; Zwischenberger and Pöchhacker 2010), the formal criteria for interpreting have a greater weight in the evaluation of a specific interpretation than a priori reasoning would suggest (e.g., Collados Aís 1998; Garzone 2003; Pradas Macías 2003; Collados Aís et al. 2007). This is evidence of the influence these formal criteria have not only on the definition of quality as a concept, but also, and fundamentally, on the perception of it. Furthermore, the results reveal a number of interactions among certain
evaluation criteria, apparently the result of the overlapping of some parameters in the subjects’ perceptions (Collados Aís et al. 2007). This points to the indivisibility of form and substance in the majority of criteria, far from the rigid distinction between the verbal and the non-verbal. In fact, the deficiencies of certain formal parameters not only affect the perception of the quality of an interpretation, but also may have a negative impact on the subjects’ understanding (Holub 2010; Rennert 2010). It has also been shown that if comprehension is seen as a measure of the communicative effect of the speech, it may also be a valid method for evaluating the quality of an interpretation (Reithofer 2013), a conclusion that should be taken into account in future research in this area.

Other, more recent studies make it clear that there are other factors or elements beyond those traditionally considered to be quality parameters. These additional factors, which include the users’ first impressions of the interpreters (García Becerra 2012) and the activation of stereotypes related to the interpreter’s non-native accent (Cheung 2013) may determine the overall assessment of an interpretation.

Without a doubt, interdisciplinarity is also providing new analytical tools that facilitate a more diversified analysis of the different elements and facets that make up the concept of quality. All of this, together with the creation of research teams and even the establishment of cross-border connections, results in a uniformity and depth of research that would be difficult to achieve with isolated projects.

By the same token, the development of new technologies for analysis of both non-verbal elements (acoustics) and verbal ones (corpus treatment) and the exploitation of new forms of communication (e.g., social networks) will play a very important role in the research conducted in the future (García Becerra 2012). There is no question that these studies will bring us closer to a concept of quality that can be adopted by the different actors participating in the interpreting process, with positive implications for the profession as well as for interpreter training.

Note

1 The division of the parameters as a function of whether they are verbal or non-verbal is difficult because of the many interrelationships that exist. Nevertheless, we will keep this division for operational reasons, beginning with the non-verbal parameters followed by the verbal ones. The description of the different parameters mentioned in this section – voice (Iglesias Fernández), intonation (Barranco-Droege, Collados Aís and Pazos-Bretaña), fluency (Pradas Macías), accent (Stévaux), diction (Blasco Mayor), style (Pérez-Luzardo Díaz and Barranco-Droege), terminology (García de Quesada), cohesion (Jiménez Ivars), and complete and accurate meaning transfer (Nobs, Pradas Macías and Fernández Sánchez) – represents a summary of the different chapters that make up Collados Aís et al. (2011).

Further reading

A selection of papers that focuses on the issue of quality in conference interpreting, covering very different fields and approaches.

An updated view of the research on the quality parameters of simultaneous interpreting. This volume provides an in-depth look at ten quality parameters which are described by using a multidisciplinary approach.

A selection of papers that offers an overview of the state of the art in interpreting quality from different perspectives.


A selection of papers on quality in interpreting being a common responsibility of all the participants in different settings such as legal, medical and community interpreting in different countries.


A comprehensive overview of interpreting studies bringing together the key articles in the field and putting them in their thematic and social contexts.

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**Bibliography**


Ángela Collados Aís and Olalla García Becerra


24

ASSESSMENT

Jean Turner

Introduction

The notion of interpreting quality is indeed multi-faceted, complex, and dynamic as Collados Aís and García Becerra observe (see Chapter 23, this volume); equally multi-faceted and complex are the knowledge, ability, and skills of a competent interpreter or successful interpreter-in-training. Contributing to the complexity is a conundrum; users of interpreting services are not able to comprehensively evaluate the quality of interpretation events because they cannot understand the source material. Who then, should evaluate an interpretation, and against what criteria or standards?

To address these questions and others, the goals of this chapter include: (1) providing readers an overview of current practice in the areas of certification testing for court interpreting and medical interpreting as well as admissions testing for interpreter training programs; (2) discussion of assessment-related issues and concerns in the specified professional settings and at the various stages in interpreters’ training, including admission, formative, and summative assessment; and (3) identifying important areas of on-going challenge. In this chapter, research and theory in the assessment of interpreting spoken language that has been published since 2000 is reviewed, focusing primarily on work published in English, though some seminal work published prior to that time is referenced.

An observation by Clifford (2005) serves as a useful introduction to a discussion of testing practices in interpreting. He noted that “while it is clear that an interpreter’s lack-luster performance can have very serious consequences, it is much less obvious what steps should be taken to ensure that interpreters do good work” (p. 98). Among the important questions he addressed in his research on evaluating the work of interpreters is this: “What exactly should be assessed?” (p. 98). This question is related to the concept of test validity, which Sawyer (2004, p. 14) described as “an argument or a series of arguments for the effectiveness of a test for a particular purpose.” As Sawyer noted, a test must be valid for its intended purpose; that is, evidence must be assembled to support a “justification” of a test’s use for a particular purpose.

The reliability of a test, its consistency of measurement, is another critical characteristic of a test. The type of reliability relevant to the testing of interpreters varies depending on the type of test. High-stakes multiple-choice tests like the Written Examination for the U.S. Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination must have a demonstrably high level of internal consistency,
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the extent to which the items’ statistical performance is similar (Turner, Impara, and Romberger, 2012, p. 14). However, another frequently used test format in the testing of interpreters is performance testing. Performance tests require human scoring so a different type of reliability is relevant, interrater reliability, the consistency of multiple scorers’ application of scoring criteria.

Clifford (2001) observed that “performance-based assessment evaluates behavior in a realistic context designed to target particular competencies” (p. 375); when testing the skills, knowledge, and abilities of interpreters, a performance test requires them to perform tasks that are similar to those interpreters do on the job. Clifford’s description of a four-step cycle for the design, implementation, and use of performance tests (p. 375) highlighted the rigor that is necessary to achieve an acceptable degree of validity and reliability. The first step, intention, contributes directly to validity and involves deliberate decisions to evaluate specific skills, behavior, and knowledge. The second, the actual measurement, is done through the test taker’s engagement in tasks similar to those done by interpreters as they carry out their professional responsibilities. The third, judgment, is done by evaluators trained to use a rubric, or scoring guide, which defines the specific levels of quality for the skills, behaviors, and knowledge the performance test tasks are designed to tap. The fourth, decision, as Clifford noted, is made “by comparing the level of performance achieved [by an individual] against some minimum standards set within the profession” (p. 375). The consistency of scores across raters and the consistency of decisions across raters are the basis for interrater reliability. Clear, transparent criteria are a starting point for interrater reliability; however, scorers must be trained in how to apply the criteria to attain an acceptable degree of interrater reliability. (See Chapter 23 for discussion of quality criteria.)

Clifford (2005) noted that the original approaches to assessing quality in interpreting focused primarily on flaws in the interpretation product (p. 98). Great attention was given in assessment procedures to identifying errors and classifying their gravity, though Pöchhacker’s work in 2001 established four areas of concern beyond errors, including accuracy, adequacy, equivalency, and success. Grbić’s (2008) observation that “quality is not intrinsic to an object” (p. 234), and her thought-provoking discussion of deriving benchmarks for quality from the perspectives of exception, perfection, and fitness for purpose provides a framework for further research on the evaluation of interpreting. With regard to the area of fitness for purpose, a user’s perception of the quality of an interpretation is an important consideration. Kurz’s (2001) review of research on users’ impression of interpretation quality highlighted on-going attention in the literature to this issue, though she observed that users of interpreters’ services are often considered “poor judges of quality since they lack one of the most crucial means of assessing quality – an understanding of the source message” (p. 403). She recommended research aimed at developing “user expectation profiles” (p. 407) as a productive direction for examining interpreter quality from the perspective of users’ satisfaction (p. 407).

Clifford (2005, p. 102) identified an additional shortcoming of scoring approaches that focus only on the product, noting that they are not “sufficient” when “decisions about the sample are used to make wider inferences.” The potential insufficiency of a scoring approach is particularly important for a certification examination, “which is intended to determine whether individuals possess the competencies that are needed for practice in a particular professional field.” He posed a very important question about the relevance of test tasks to interpreters’ work; “what if the things we ask a test taker to do on a test bear no relationship to the activities he or she would undertake in the profession” (p. 103) and noted that one of the critical aspects of test validity is the extent to which a test measures what it is intended to measure (p. 104). Clifford argued convincingly for establishing an evidential basis for the appropriateness of test design, test scoring, and test use, a concept that he refers to as a psychometric approach in the sense that principles of measurement and evaluation are followed (p. 128). As he wrote, “we need to
collect evidence to provide an indication of the reliability and validity of certification tests, so that we can make appropriate assumptions based on their results” (p. 103). Though he referred specifically to certification tests, these principles should be followed in the design, development, and use of any type of test used for making decisions about people, their lives, their well-being, or the quality of services that they might provide or receive.

The growing interest in interpreter testing

There is a history of concern regarding the nature and adequacy of assessment practices in the area of interpreting, though this interest has intensified in the past 15 years concomitant with the growth of the profession. There is an increasing number of professionals studying for advanced degrees in Interpreting Studies and related fields whose interest in assessment is reflected in their informative and thought-provoking research in the areas of empirically-driven test design and development (Angelelli, 2007), issues related to the training of interpreters and assessment of their skills (Sawyer, 2004), the nature and definition of test constructs (Clifford, 2001; Timarová and Salaet, 2011), and test development and trialing (Angelelli, 2007; Liu, 2013; Clifford, 2005; Cai, 2013). In addition, Læfber’s dissertation (2012), though in the area of translation rather than interpreting, is particularly noteworthy given her application of her research findings to the development of workshops on an evidential approach to developing scoring criteria and training of raters (2013).

The intensified attention to assessment issues was reflected in an international symposium held in 2008 in Antwerp, Belgium and a special issue of the journal Interpreting, which includes reports on seven of the ten symposium papers (Shlesinger and Pöchhacker, 2011). The second edition of Fundamentals of Court Interpretation (González, Vásquez, and Mikkelson, 2012) and two edited volumes on assessment-related research (Angelelli and Jacobson, 2009; Tsagari and van Deemter, 2013) present additional insights and information on assessment practices and research. Collaborative projects carried out by professionals within and across the fields of interpreting studies and applied linguistics in the assessment of the interpreting process and product seem to have been particularly productive, as I discuss in the next sections.

Types of testing

The research reviewed and discussed in this chapter can be placed into three categories according to the intended use of the tests:

- admissions or aptitude testing
- certification testing
- formative and summative testing of interpreters in training.

An overview of practices, issues and concerns, and on-going challenges in establishing and maintaining the reliability and validity of tests in each of these three areas is presented in the following sections.

Admissions or aptitude testing

Tests that are used in making decisions regarding admission to undergraduate and graduate degree programs or short-term training programs are often referred to in the interpreting studies literature as aptitude tests. Russo (2011) defined aptitude in interpreting as “an overall term
encompassing abilities, skills and personal traits deemed necessary (according to common sense) or reliable predictors (according to scientific research) of successful interpreting training” (p. 25). Pöchhacker (2011) observed that aptitude tests in interpreting are created or chosen to measure a “complex set of abilities and skills” (p. 107). Timaróvá and Ungoeod-Thomas (2008) further noted that admissions tests must “aim at testing whether a candidate has all the skills which are necessary to enter the professional market, but which will not be provided as part of the training” (p. 31) and thus “should take into consideration both the candidates’ abilities and the instruction afforded by the particular training programme” (pp. 31–2). A principle concern in the literature related to test validity has to do with test content – specifically, the knowledge, skills, and abilities that should be assessed and evidence of their relevance to both the training of interpreters and the quality of professional interpreters’ performance.

In 1991, Lambert observed that there seemed to be five points of agreement in the relatively small amount of research at that time regarding the characteristics “essential for success as a trainee in the profession” (1991, p. 587):

1. Profound knowledge of active and passive languages and cultures.
2. Ability to grasp rapidly and convey the essential meaning of what is being said.
3. Ability to project information with confidence, coupled with good voice.
4. Wide general knowledge and interests, and a willingness to acquire new information.
5. Ability to work as part of a team.

Twenty years later, in Russo’s review and summary of the literature “over the years” in aptitude testing, she presented a “framework of abilities and personal qualities based on the intuition of interpreting trainers, scholars and professionals” (p. 11), noting that the framework was “further enriched” by contributions from educational psychology, particularly Carroll’s (1978), drawn from his work on the measurement of breadth of vocabulary and “verbal intelligence” (Carroll, 1978, cited in Russo, 2011, p. 11). Other additions to earlier lists included “general culture,” a “naming facility factor”, and “shadowing” (Russo, 2011, p. 11). In 2013, the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) presented this list of “key skills” for interpreters:

- a polished command of their own native language over a range of registers and domains
- a complete mastery of their non-native languages
- a familiarity with the cultures in the countries where their working languages are spoken
- a commitment to helping others communicate
- an interest in and understanding of current affairs, plus an insatiable curiosity
- world experience away from home and school and a broad general education
- good training (and usually at least an undergraduate university degree)
- the ability to concentrate and focus as a discussion unfolds
- a pleasant speaking voice
- a friendly, collegial attitude
- calm nerves, tact, judgment and a sense of humor
- a willingness to adhere to rules of conduct (e.g. confidentiality).

(AIIC Training Committee, 2013)

However, the AIIC list specifies the essential knowledge, skills, and abilities of professional interpreters, not individuals who are applying for entry to interpreter training programs. The
survey research on the admissions practices of 18 schools conducted by Timarová and Ungoed-
Thomas (2008) gives a good sense of the skills testers intend to tap and the types of tasks that are
included in the schools’ admission tests. The authors’ analysis of the skills tapped by the various
test components revealed that language skills were mentioned by 16 of the 18 schools; language
comprehension was mentioned by 15. Communication skills and general knowledge were mentioned
by 13 schools; analytic skills and problem solving were mentioned by 11 schools and five schools
respectively. Summarizing and memory were noted by eight schools. Interestingly, personality
was noted by seven schools. Other skill areas included translation skills (six schools), consecutive
skills (five schools), writing (three schools), voice and motivation (two schools), and processing and speed
(one school each).

Timarová and Ungoed-Thomas reported that the test task used by the greatest number of
respondents was consecutive interpreting (16 of the 18 schools), though the authors did not
indicate whether cross-language paraphrasing, such as described by Skaaden (2013), was included
in the category of “consecutive interpreting” or tallied elsewhere, perhaps in the area of analytic
skills. Skaaden described such a task in her discussion of the admissions test for a one-year course
for interpreters working in the public sector in Norway. As she wrote, the candidate hears
“a short exposé, sequence by sequence” in the source language and then “must immediately
repeat each sequence in the target language” (p. 39). Skaaden noted that the task “with relative
authenticity mimics the task of consecutive interpreting in dialogues” (p. 39) and argued its
usefulness in admissions decisions despite the challenges to test design and rater consistency
presented by “the need to test bilingual skills in an array of languages” (p. 38).

Additional tasks reported by Timarová and Ungoed-Thomas (2008) to be frequently used in
admissions testing were interviews (in 10 of the 18 schools) and tests of general knowledge (in
nine of the 18 schools). Six schools reported using written translation and sight translation tasks,
perhaps proponents of the view expressed by Skaaden (2013) in her defense of the paraphrase
task mentioned above – that written translation cannot measure important qualities such as
pronunciation or “how well the candidate’s bilingual abilities hold up under the time pressure,”
but it can “reveal characteristics of the candidate’s bilingual lexicon, grammars, and writing
capacities” (p. 37).

Russo (2011) noted that “the ideal interpreter profile has not changed dramatically over time”
and asserted that the lack of change points to a “broad consistency in professionals’, trainers’, and
researchers’ views of what makes a good interpreter” and “provides a fairly homogeneous
framework of reference for what to look for in an interpreting candidate” (p. 24) (italics in
original). However, Timarová and Ungoed-Thomas (2008) indicated that the degree of agree-
ment among the respondents regarding the types of tasks typically incorporated into admissions
tests could simply be an indication that that “very little experimenting is being done” (p. 43).
Timarová and Ungoed-Thomas (2009) encouraged researchers to explore additional techniques
and assessment tools that “aim at assessing skills related directly to interpreting and/or the ability
to acquire the interpreting skill” but observed that “the tests should not make unreasonable
expectations of candidates who have not been trained in interpreting yet” (p. 241). They noted
that “tests should be ideally based on empirical evidence rather than only on face validity, i.e.,
superficial resemblance to interpreting and intuitive appeal” (p. 241) and as they recommended
in 2008, encouraged colleagues to trial new ideas and systematically evaluate their usefulness as
well as the usefulness of “conventional ones to see if they offer better prediction over a number
of years” (Timarová and Ungoed-Thomas, 2008, p. 43). The research done by Timarová and
Salaets (2011) on the contribution to admissions testing of measures of learning styles, motivation,
and cognitive flexibility suggested these measures may complement conventional tasks. The
study involved a relatively small number of participants and was conducted in one setting, thus
the findings may have limited application to admission testing in other settings, but the study raised important questions regarding the role of these abilities and attributes in trainee success. Turner (2013) described a principled approach to redesigning components of an admission test for graduate studies that accommodates the small number of candidates in some languages. The cross-disciplinary team included interpreters, interpreter trainers, and an applied linguist; the languages represented by the team members included English, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, French, German, and Spanish. At the outset of their multi-year project, they conducted a series of focus sessions, using their collective experience and expertise to identify the set of constructs that would be included in the new admissions test. The outcomes of this work were incorporated into a framework for specification of test tasks. The test specification document itself served as a record of their on-going decisions as they developed their ideas. The plan included small scale trials of novel test tasks and the development and trial of scoring rubrics. The empirically-based process the team used to develop the scoring rubrics was drawn from Upshur and Turner (1995) and involved an iterative process of characterizing the features of candidates’ performance that have an impact on scorers’ perception of performance quality. The screening tests, which are currently being trialed, include assessment of language comprehension, monolingual language production, cross-language written production, and cross-language oral production.

A number of issues can be extracted or inferred from the research and theory-building in admissions testing for interpretation studies. First, though there is some agreement among interpreter trainers on the skills and knowledge that trainees should have when entering interpreter training and on the types of test tasks that should be used on admissions or screening tests, empirical evidence of the usefulness of these tasks is needed. Second, an essential consideration in the design of an admissions test must be the characteristics of the instructional program where the test is to be used. Third, the number of candidates in some languages indicates that the evidential basis for the validity and reliability of these tests requires careful record keeping, and further, the appropriate use of the statistics used in large-scale testing programs requires a large number of candidates, a number that cannot be attained in some programs and in some languages.

**Certification testing**

In certification testing, the demonstrable usefulness of tests for indicating that an individual has the skills, knowledge, and abilities to carry out satisfactory practice is needed. As noted by Kelly (2007) the term *certification* may be viewed differently by different constituencies, such as members of a professional organization, organizations that provide training and testing for members of that profession, and people who use the services of members of that profession. However, in this discussion of certification testing of interpreters, a certification test is one used to determine whether a candidate holds the knowledge and skills deemed necessary for satisfactory practice of the profession. Note that certification testing is referred to as *accreditation testing* in Australia (Hale, Garcia, Hlavac, Kim, Lai, Turner, and Slatyer, 2012).

Typically, the requisite knowledge and skills needed for satisfactory practice by a professional are defined by an organization of the professionals or a government agency charged with monitoring the practice of the profession. (Some interpreter training programs issue a *certificate of completion* to individuals who successfully complete the training, which attests only to completion of that training.) Hale et al. observed that “there is currently no international standard that applies to how credentialing organizations around the word assess and award certification” (2012, p. 29). The great variation in certification policies and practices among countries that have certification reflect this lack.
Hale et al. noted that among countries with certification policies and practices there are two main avenues for certification of interpreters. The first avenue, which the authors identified as “the traditional approach taken by most European and Latin American countries” (p. 29), is through undergraduate and graduate level university programs. The second avenue, which the authors noted is often taken by countries they characterize as “immigrant and refugee host countries,” is through testing. The authors observed, however, that the two approaches appear to be converging in practice. They reported that in the U.S. and Canada, for example, university and shorter training programs that supplement testing are increasing in number while some European countries are enhancing existing university programs by offering training and testing of interpreters in immigrants’ languages (p. 29). In the discussion that follows of certification testing at the federal and state level and in medical contexts the focus is on the contrasting certification practices of Australia and the U.S. However, readers who are interested in interpreter certification in Taiwan will find Lui’s (2013) description of the development of the interpreter certification exams very informative, though the testing program does not provide certification for court or medical interpreting. For those interested in certification of community or social interpreters, Roels (2013) described the design and development of a certification exam for community interpreters in the autonomous region of Flanders in Belgium. (Note that community interpreting is also known as public service interpreting, service interpreting, and social interpreting.) Corsellis (2008) presented a comprehensive overview of the nature and need for community interpreting in the European Union as well as information on the training and testing of community interpreters. Skaaden’s (2013) description of the training and testing system developed in Norway to address the need for public service interpreters is discussed later in this chapter.

**The legislation of certification testing for court and medical interpreters**

González, Vásquez, and Mikkelson (2012) noted that “one of the essential characteristics of a profession is the standards of entrance and conduct that it upholds,” asserting that “a performance-based examination that measures a candidate’s skills” and is scored according to “established criteria” is essential when there is a lack of “standard educational programs” for practitioners of the profession (p. 1159). (See Chapter 25 in this volume for a discussion of interpreter training.) Indeed, the testing of interpreters and the provision of interpreting services is not simply essential, but a legislated requirement in many court and medical contexts.

The *Multicultural Language Services Guidelines* produced by the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC, 2013) states, “Australia’s Multicultural Policy acknowledges that Australian Government programs and services must be responsive to the needs of all our communities as a multicultural society and places the onus on the Australian Government to deliver equitable services and outcomes to Australians of all backgrounds” (p. 9). In 2014, the current certification system in Australia does not include specialist certification of court or medical interpreters, but as discussed below, the development of training and testing programs to provide certification in these areas has been identified as a priority (Hale et al., 2012) with the proposed changes to take effect in 2016 (NAATI, 2013b).

In the U.S., as reported in González, Vásquez, and Mikkelson (2012), the Court Interpreters Act of 1978 mandated the use of court interpreters in U.S. federal courts for people whose primary language is not English and for those who have impaired hearing; the Act also requires that the interpreters be “qualified through a certification examination” (p. 6). Regarding court certification at the state level, González, Vásquez, and Mikkelson reported that as of 2012, “the majority of states have statutes and regulations that determine the use of court interpreters,” though “provisions vary substantially from state to state regarding interpreter qualifications and
eligibility criteria for interpreter use” (p. 7). Regarding the provision of medical interpreters, Executive Order 13166, signed by President Clinton in 2000, strengthened the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by requiring all federal agencies to produce a plan for providing language access to their services, including health care. The need for interpreter services is therefore established in both countries by legislation, even specifying in the case of the U.S. that interpreters be qualified through testing.

Certification of interpreters in Australia

The National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI), the Australian organization responsible for certification of interpreters, is owned by the federal, state, and territory governments of Australia. As noted in Hale et al. (2012), it has the “laudable aim to accredit over 60 international languages and 45 indigenous languages” and “has been internationally recognized, as very few countries have managed to have uniform systems that give credentials in so many languages” (p. 10).

In 2011, NAATI began a three-phase review, revision, and trial of the components of the certification testing system for interpreters. At that time, four levels of NAATI certification for interpreters were possible: Paraprofessional Interpreter, Interpreter, Conference Interpreter, and Advanced (Senior) Interpreter. The two lower levels, Paraprofessional Interpreter and Interpreter, could be achieved by testing (NAATI, 2014) though the higher levels required completion of a diploma or degree, evidence of overseas qualifications or membership in a NAATI recognized international association, or evidence provided by the individual of his or her advanced level of expertise (Hale et al., 2012, p. 21). The multi-year review, revision, and trial of the Australian certification system has taken place in three stages. Stage 1 involved a review of relevant literature and current policies. Stage 2 involved the work of specialist teams which focused on rubrics and competency-based testing, test and scorer reliability, technology, and specializations in interpreting. In Stage 3, a new conceptual model for certification testing was created with recommendations for its implementation (p. 9). One of the Stage 3 recommendations is to replace the four existing levels of interpreter certification by General and Specialist certification, with certification in four areas, Legal/Court, Medical, Conference, and Business, priority being given to Legal/Court and Medical certification (p. 8). This intensive three-stage effort has involved cross-disciplinary team work and resulted in a framework and implementation plan that addresses several distinct challenges, including the need for specialized testing and providing valid and reliable testing in a multitude of languages.

Federal court interpreter certification in the U.S.

Unlike Australia, certification of court interpreters in the U.S. is carried out separately for the federal and state court systems. The Administrative Office of the United States Courts (AOUSC) is responsible for certifying federal court interpreters, which in 2014, is done only in Spanish. The National Center for State Courts (NCSC) develops and administers the Federal Court Interpreter Certification Examination (FCICE) for the AOUSC (NCSC, 2014a). For a comprehensive description of the current FCICE and the history of its development, see González, Vásquez, and Mikkelson (2012).

The FCICE has two distinct phases, the Written Examination (WE) and the Oral Examination (OE). The FCICE WE has five parts in both English and Spanish: Reading Comprehension, Grammar and Idiom Usage, Error Detection, Synonyms, and Best Translation. All of the WE items are four-option multiple-choice and scoring is automated. Candidates must have a minimum score
of 75% in both languages to be eligible to take the OE (NCSC, 2014a). The FCICE OE has five parts, sight translation from Spanish into English and English into Spanish, simultaneous interpretation of a monologue from English into Spanish, consecutive interpretation in both language directions, and simultaneous interpreting of witness testimony from English into Spanish (NCSC, 2014b). Standardized scoring units are identified for each of the OE parts. OE scorers are federally certified interpreters who undergo intensive training in how to rate the scoring units and a candidate’s test performance is scored by three of these trained interpreters who “must converge in determining when interpretations of scoring units are correct or incorrect” (NCSC, 2014b).

González, Vásquez, and Mikkelson (2012) reported that from the first administration of the FCICE in 1980 through 2009, the certification rate for the two phases of the FCICE was slightly over 5%, with a total of 1,194 interpreters awarded federal court interpreter certification (pp. 1172–3). The authors commented on the fact that the low certification rate has been “disturbing to many” and noted that the FCICE has been criticized for this reason despite evidence of its reliability and validity (Hewitt and Stansfield, 2002; Stansfield and Hewitt, 2005; Turner, Impara, and Romberger, 2012). In their discussion of the test’s passing rate, González, Vásquez, and Mikkelson explained that “the Spanish/English bilingual population in the U.S. has not been encouraged to develop both its languages through formal education and study” (p. 1177) and expressed their belief that “education and training would be effective in helping candidates develop proficiency” (p. 1178). In Chapter 25 in this volume, Bao comments on the increase in training programs in response to the need for certified interpreters. As González, Vásquez, and Mikkelson noted, “one very positive consequence of the FCICE is that it has enhanced the prestige of the court interpreting profession by acknowledging the extreme difficulty of the tasks involved” and “federal achievement has come to be regarded as the pinnacle of achievement for court interpreters” (p. 1179). Perhaps with time, the increase in regard from outside and inside the profession will lead to a greater number and variety of training programs, indirectly addressing the recognized shortage of federally certified court interpreters in Spanish.

Another criticism, however, of the FCICE certification process is that it is offered in only one language, Spanish. Though the AOUSC had initially supported the development of certification testing in Navajo and Haitian Creole as well as Spanish, and between 1990 and 1992 there was a small number of interpreters certified in Navajo (nine) and Haitian Creole (13), these two language programs were cancelled in 1993 along with plans for the development of tests in nine additional languages (González, Vásquez, and Mikkelson, 2012, pp. 1175–6). The authors did not address reasons for cancelling the development of the FCICE in additional languages; however, the cost per certified interpreter of developing tests in additional languages must have been an important consideration in the decision.

**State court interpreter certification in the U.S.**

Certification policies and practices for state court interpreters in the U.S. are determined at the state level and thus vary across the states. The National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators (NAJIT), an organization of professional interpreters, provides a certification test in Spanish, the National Judiciary Interpreter and Translator Certification Examination (NJITCE). The NJITCE program was developed by the organization to “create a uniform standard for interpreters and translators working in a wide variety of legal settings, both civil and penal, throughout the United States” and is “the only examination that confers a credential offered by the profession, that belongs to the individual regardless of employment status or geographic location” (NAJIT, 2014). Like the FCICE, the NJITCE testing program has two phases, a
written phase and an oral phase and successful performance on the written phase determines eligibility for taking the oral phase. The written phase tests Spanish and English knowledge of vocabulary (antonyms and synonyms), analogies, grammar/syntax, and reading comprehension; knowledge of ethics is tested only in English. The ability to translate from Spanish to English and English to Spanish is also tested. The oral phase includes sight translation tasks in both language directions, consecutive interpretation of a question and answer session with the questions in English and the responses in Spanish, and simultaneous interpretation in both directions (NAJIT, 2014). González, Vásquez, and Mikkelson wrote in 2012 that no reliability or validity evidence was available, and this seems to be the case in 2014; however, as they noted, the NJITCE is “the initial effort of a national professional organization to define the field of court interpreting and its performance standards, marking the field’s advancement” (p. 1198). The NJITCE is also the only certification test for state courts that supports certification across states. It is currently accepted by 11 states, with additional states working toward its acceptance and plans in place to provide certification testing in additional languages in the future (NAJIT, 2014).

In contrast to the NJITCE program are the certification tests provided through the National Center for State Courts Consortium, founded in 1995 (NCSC, 2014c). According to González, Vásquez, and Mikkelson, in 2012, 43 of the 50 states were members of the NCSC Consortium (2012, p. 235). The members pool their resources and share the responsibility for developing certification tests in the vast number of languages which arise in the state courts. As noted by the authors, the individual states are responsible for certification rather than the Consortium, but the Consortium does “employ a standardization process for the construction of all new examinations and the modification of existing tests and tests newly contributed by member states” (González, Vásquez, and Mikkelson, 2012, p. 1184). They reported that despite the standardization of the tests, differences in testing remain across languages; this point in combination with differences in how states choose to use and administer the Consortium tests and how they interpret scores from the tests has led to “significant variation in the level of interpreter competence from state to state” (p. 1184).

The responsibility for providing certification of federal court interpreters is carried out both in Australia and the U.S. by a central government agency; however, federal certification is available in a multitude of languages in Australia and only one in the U.S. At the state level, the practices of the two countries are quite different. In Australia the responsibility for certification at the state level is carried out by the same government agency that handles federal certification of interpreters; in the U.S. the individual states are responsible for certifying interpreters. Through collaboration in the form of the Consortium, many U.S. states manage to address the variety of languages for which there is a need, but there is disparity in the qualification of interpreters across the states. The NAJIT certification addressed the disparity across states, but is currently available only in Spanish. In the U.S., the legislated call for equal access to justice for those who do not speak English seems to be offset by the sheer cost of developing and maintaining certification of interpreters in the enormous number of languages needed.

**Medical interpreter certification in the U.S.**

Hale et al. (2012) cited Roat (2006), who noted that in 2006 there were at least ten interpreter certification programs focusing on healthcare. According to the National Council for Interpreting in Health Care (NCIHC), which published the National Standards for Healthcare Interpreting Programs in 2011 (NCIHC, 2011), there are currently two national-level processes for certification of medical interpreters (NCIHC, n.d). NCIHC officially endorsed the certification process of the Certification Commission for Healthcare Interpreters (CCHI) and described CCHI as “a national
non-profit organization that certifies spoken-language interpreters through a national, valid, credible, vendor neutral testing program” (NCICH, n.d.). The CCHI awards two levels of certification; the basic level is Associate Healthcare Interpreter (AHI). The AHI level is designated on the basis of successful performance on a 100-item multiple-choice test “that measures knowledge that is essential to competence in managing the functions of healthcare interpreters” (CCHI, 2011, p. 13). The second level of certification, CHI certification, is offered only in languages for which there is an oral examination; in 2014 those languages are Spanish, Arabic, and Mandarin Chinese. The oral examination “assesses interpretation for spoken communication and translation for written communication” (CCHI, 2011, p. 17). In the oral examination, the four initial tasks are based on dialogues between a healthcare provider and a patient, the patient’s family, or the patient’s care giver (CCHI, 2011, p. 17). There are then two tasks that require simultaneous interpretation, one from English to the language other than English (LOTE) and one from the LOTE into English. There are then three short sight translation tasks. (Translation, the final task, is tapped by requiring test takers to identify the best translation from several options.) An interpreter who has the AHI certification is informed by CCHI when the oral examination in his or her language is made available and must then take the oral examination with a year to receive CHI. The AHI certification for interpreters who do not sit for the CHI examination with that year is voided.

The National Board for Certification of Medical Interpreters (NBCMI), which is an independent division of the International Medical Interpreters Association (IMIA), also certifies medical interpreters – the Certified Medical Interpreter (CMI) designation. The Certified Medical Interpreter Candidate Handbook (NBCMI, 2014) indicates that before taking the written and oral tests that comprise the CMI testing program, candidates in Spanish must have evidence they (1) have worked as a medical interpreter for a period of one year (if applying on or before July 15, 2014; candidates in new languages are allowed 3½ years to verify one-year of employment); or (2) meet English and LOTE proficiency standards, hold a high school diploma or equivalent, and have a minimum of 40 hours of training in medical interpreting. The CMI has two phases, a written examination and an oral examination; the CMI designation is offered only in languages in which there is an oral exam. In 2014, these languages include Spanish, Russian, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, and Vietnamese.

The CMI candidate must first sit for and pass the written test. The written test is delivered on computer and is in English. It has 51 items and taps knowledge in seven topical areas: (1) roles of the medical interpreter; (2) ethics; (3) cultural competence; (4) medical terminology; (5) medical specialties; (6) interpreter standards of practice; and (7) legislation and regulations (NBCMI, 2014, pp. 9–10). The oral examination is also delivered by computer and includes two sight translations and 12 scenarios. The six topics addressed in the oral test include: (1) mastery of linguistic knowledge of English; (2) mastery of linguistic knowledge of the LOTE; (3) interpreting knowledge and skills; (4) cultural competence; (5) medical terminology; and (6) medical specialties. The evaluation criteria include accuracy of meaning, listening and retention, grammatical accuracy, interpreting style, and knowledge of terminology and specialties.

As of 2014, Australia does not have national certification in the area of medical interpreting, though the development of a training and testing program to support such certification was identified as a high priority (NAATI, 2013a), with completion of the new certification program anticipated in 2016 (NAATI, 2013b). In contrast, in the U.S. there are currently two distinct entities that provide certification of medical interpreters on the national level. According to Mikkelson (personal communication, 2013), both interpreters and health care providers are a bit confused by the choice and often decide which certification to pursue on the basis of the language in which certification is sought. Given the legislated need for access to health care and the cost
of developing and maintaining a certification testing program, collaboration and consolidation of resources should be productive.

**Formative and summative testing**

Formative testing is on-going assessment intended to measure learners’ developing skills and knowledge, primarily for the purpose of refining instruction (Mertler, 2003). Formative tests in instructional programs for interpreters are typically designed by professors or trainers to measure their students’ learning of specific skills or mastery of specific areas of knowledge. The outcomes of formative assessment are used to identify any gaps in the learning of individuals or a class. Formative assessment also provides information to instructors so they can modify their instruction to address gaps in their students’ learning and advise individuals on how they can address specific areas of concern.

Summative testing is typically conducted at the end of a program of study or a segment of a program to verify that the learners in the program have met the learning objectives and are ready to move on to subsequent training or professional practice. The intermediate and final assessments described in Sawyer (2004) can be considered summative assessment. Sawyer (2004) used the term *intermediate assessment* in his discussion of curriculum design and assessment practices when referring to formative testing that takes place at “the level of the apprentice” and is “conducted after the introductory courses” (p. 112). He observed that it “has the purpose of assessing whether the candidate has the potential to continue and successfully complete the degree program” (p. 12). He uses the term *final assessment* to describe testing that takes place “on the level of the journeyman” which indicates whether the candidate is ready to enter the market as a professional (p. 113).

In interpreter education, as Wu (2013) noted, “assessment usually refers to evaluating students’ learning outcomes, identifying their strengths and weaknesses, which normally involves assigning a mark or a grade to the students’ performance” (p. 15). He believes that “research into interpreting assessment … is still at an exploratory stage, and many important concepts and instruments, such as test constructs and assessment criteria, are still underdeveloped” (p. 16).

Importantly, he noted that “any well-thought-out examination criteria, procedures and test instruments will be of little value in test reliability, and therefore validity, if examiners do not use them consistently or if the design of the instrument itself makes it hard to use them consistently” (p. 16), emphasizing the importance of both evidence of reliability and validity.

The assessment and accreditation system that Skaaden (2013) described is an interesting example of a country’s solutions to the need for qualified interpreters; the system also illustrates both aptitude and summative assessment practices. According to Skaaden, the assessment and accreditation system for social interpreters was instigated in Norway to address the “registered need for interpreting in more than 100 languages in the Norwegian public sector” (p. 35). The system includes an initial test that serves a screening function and a final test that serves a summative function. The author identified two main challenges to the development of valid, reliable tests presented by the large number of languages: (1) ensuring that test content is similar across languages; and (2) ensuring that test administration and scoring are consistent across administrations and languages (p. 38). Skaaden noted that the training component does not include instruction in language, so “the admissions test aims to eliminate candidates whose bilingualism is not yet strong enough to follow the course’s learning activities” (p. 38). Bilingual candidates for the program are recruited through both print and internet ads (p. 40) and the initial screening for admission to the program is done in both of a candidate’s languages. The screening tests can be given over the phone or face-to-face and involve two testers; a Norwegian examiner and an
examiner in the candidate’s other language. The test content in both languages must conform to clearly established criteria (p. 39) and to ensure that the content of the test is of similar difficulty across the many languages needed, the material is crafted by carefully guided bilinguals working from a Norwegian text. The challenge of locating speakers who are qualified to assist in test development, test administration, and test scoring in all of the needed languages led to the establishment of a “network of bilinguals from different professions” (p. 42). The bilinguals are instructed and guided in the development of test content as well as test administration.

A candidate’s test performance is scored separately for quality of rendition and pronunciation and grammar. Each test segment (a test has 12–15 segments) is scored for quality of rendition and receives a score between 0, meaning is lost, to 6, meaning is conveyed completely (p. 43). The total rendition score is determined by summing the rendition scores for the segments (p. 39). Pronunciation and grammar are “impressionist measures” expressed as a percent. The rendition score accounts for 50% of the total score while pronunciation and grammar each contribute 25% to the total score. The pass rate for the screening test is reported to be approximately 40% and “nearly 400 students in 49 languages” completed the course (p. 44). The author concluded that the screening test – and the instruction program – are appropriately designed; the completion rate for the program is 80% or higher for each of the five years examined in the study and only 2.5% of the students had failing grades for the course (p. 44). However, as she observed, both the validity of the test tasks and the reliability of scoring rely on the essential contributions of the bilingual speakers of the language other than Norwegian. Though the bilinguals are closely guided in the development of the test material and in scoring by an experienced supervisor, she noted that “in further development of the test and its administration, measures to enhance reliability should be accentuated, in particular in the areas of bilingual task construction and interrater consistency” (p. 47).

Conclusion

In 2009, Angelelli and Jacobson noted that there was “a lack of empirical research on both translator and interpreter competence and performance, and on assessing process and products for different purposes” (p. 4); however, the growing number of publications and presentations on assessment practices at distinct stages in the training and professional development of interpreters provides a wealth of valuable information to guide future endeavors.

Mikkelsen (2009) described 13 major types of interpreting, characterizing them from the perspective of how the interpreting is done (simultaneous, consecutive, and whisper), the context in which the event takes place (conference/seminar, court, business, education, medical, and media), for whom the interpreting is done (escort and community), and through what medium (over-the-phone). She observed that there is divisiveness within the interpreting profession despite there being a core of knowledge and skills all interpreters must share: language knowledge, analytic skill, listening and recall, interpersonal skills, ethical behavior, speaking skills, cultural knowledge, and subject knowledge (p. 11). She argued persuasively for the adoption of a multi-parameter approach to categorizing interpreting to reduce divisiveness and disparity and promote the development of strong professional organizations. NAJIT appears to be such an organization and the members’ commitment to developing a certification program for court interpreters has resulted in standardization of certification in Spanish among the states that accept the NJITCE. The success of this endeavor has established a path for the organization’s reported plan (NAJIT, 2014) to expand standardized certification into additional languages.

Australia’s three-stage collaborative effort to review and update policy and practices regarding the training and certification of interpreters merits the international recognition it has received
as a model for the development of a certification program. In addition to careful reporting on the activities and outcomes of each stage, the process reflects the four-step cycle for the design and implementation of performance tests described by Clifford (2001) that leads to demonstrable validity and reliability.

Collaborative, evidence-based test development efforts such as described by Angelelli (2007), Liu (2013), and Skaaden (2013) provide context-specific solutions to challenges that must be addressed in many settings. Skaaden’s (2013) ideas, for example, on identifying a network of bilinguals in a wide range of languages who can participate in the development of materials and administration of performance tests present a possible avenue to producing valid and reliable tests in many languages, even those in which there are very few, if any, bilingual experts in interpreting. The careful process she described of developing comparable materials across many languages through collaboration of the bilinguals and a supervising test expert has great potential, particularly given the attention given to addressing the relative difficulty of certain content due to cultural differences (p. 46). The description of the guidance they are given in test administration and test scoring, despite the limitations in reliability that she notes, may serve as a starting point for others as they address the challenges of developing valid, reliable interpretation tests. The careful reporting that characterizes Skaaden’s research as well as much of the research discussed in this chapter establishes a sound foundation for on-going efforts in the complex task of developing valid and reliable measures of interpreters’ abilities and skills.

Further reading


The author describes in detail the design, development, and trial, and refinement of empirically-based tests of Interpreter Readiness as well as the development of rater training procedures.


The author provides an overview of research on the expectations of users of interpreter services and builds a well-supported argument for considering users’ expectations in interpreter training and the evaluation of the interpretation quality.


The author describes the process of designing, developing, trialing, and refining interpretation certification examinations.

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Introduction

The growing demand for qualified interpreters has led to increased emphasis on interpreter training in the last two decades. According to Niska (2005), by the end of the 20th century there were some 230 academic institutions world-wide offering interpreter training in more than 60 countries. Europe led the world with 121 schools, of which 100 institutions offered 3–5 year undergraduate programs and 23 schools had 1–2 year graduate programs.

In the last decade or so, however, a large number of new interpreting programs, especially graduate programs, have been established, not only in Europe, but also in Asia and on other continents, in response to the growing demand for interpreters. In China alone, 159 graduate translation and interpretation (T&I) programs have been set up as part of the nationwide Master of Translation and Interpretation framework (MTI), a professional degree launched in 2007. In addition, 106 universities have received approval from the PRC Ministry of Education to offer undergraduate level translation and interpreting programs. In the same period of time, new programs have also emerged in Taiwan, Japan and South Korea, along with new programs in Latin American and African countries. With the addition of China’s MTI programs, Kim estimated (2013) that the total number of translation and interpreting programs in the world, by the time of her writing, should be over 600. In addition to the traditional degree and certificate programs at the undergraduate and graduate level, there has been an explosive growth in non-degree programs and courses as well as in online programs. Along with the increase in program numbers, there also have been organized efforts to share best practices and improve the quality of teaching. These major developments in the past decade have basically changed the landscape of interpreter education.

Major developments in interpreter training

*Increased emphasis on professional training at the graduate level*

Organized efforts have been made by universities and international organizations to push for professional training at the graduate level, to improve teaching and to share best practices.
European Masters in Conference Interpreting

Initiated by the European Union, an agreement was signed in May 2001 to officially set up the European Masters in Conference Interpreting (EMCI), a consortium of 11 universities in Europe which seeks to “meet the demand for highly-qualified conference interpreters, in the area of both widely and the less widely-used and less-taught languages.” The EMCI is the first organized and systematic joint international effort in the training of conference interpreters. The significance of this endeavor, however, lies more in its structure than its goals. As they join the consortium, member institutions commit to a common policy on student recruitment and assessment, and follow the same core curriculum and quality assurance standards. Consistency is thus achieved among member institutions in admission, courses and evaluation, which to a large extent ensures quality in education.

The core curriculum includes a few areas to be covered with a short description for each, such as theory of interpretation, practice of interpretation, consecutive interpretation, simultaneous interpretation, and European Union and International Organizations. Required skills and subject-area knowledge are also described. In the course structure and workload, specific requirements are made as to the length of the training. The program is designed to correspond to between 60 and 120 ECTS (i.e. the equivalent of one to two years of full-time study) under the European Credit Transfer System (ETCS). More specifically, it requires member institutions to offer

... no fewer than 400 class contact hours, of which a minimum of 75% shall be devoted to interpreting practice. In addition, students shall devote time to group practice of simultaneous and consecutive interpreting and other self-directed learning (i.e. background reading; use of information sources, e.g. radio, TV, Internet, preparation of glossaries). The program is based on the expectation that the number of class contact hours, group work hours and self-directed study shall total no less than 800 hours.

(EMCI 2014b)

As an important measure of quality assurance, the EMCI has set guidelines for admission tests and the final (or exit) exams. Although each member institution designs and administers its own tests, it must follow the established guidelines on the procedures and content of the tests and examinations. For admission into the program, a candidate must pass an aptitude test as well as a general knowledge test. Upon completion of the course work, students must take the final examination in which they are tested in both consecutive and simultaneous interpretation. Students must pass all the examinations for the language pair in order to be awarded the EMCI certificate. For both the entrance and final examinations, students’ performance must be reviewed and judged by a panel that must include a majority of professional interpreters and interpreter trainers. For the exit examination, however, the test panel must also include at least one external examiner, and a representative from the European institutions, although other international organizations and other member institutions of the EMCI Consortium may be invited (EMCI 2014a).

The EMCI core curriculum leaves some flexibility to the member institutions in curriculum design by providing the general guidelines on the areas of training without specifying the titles of the courses, but tries to ensure quality and consistency by implementing a common policy on student recruitment and assessment, setting the minimum level of contact hours and workload, and putting in place stringent procedures for final examinations, including the composition of test panels, which are essential links that ensure quality in interpreter training. The curriculum
and its specific requirements on recruitment, assessment and student workload may be something that is commonly seen in well-established schools or programs, but it is significant that these policies and measures are being implemented across the board within a consortium of 11 universities. Best practices have been effectively shared among the members through the design and implementation of the core curriculum which aimed at “serving as a model for all European institutions offering courses for conference interpreters” (Bonnard-Sjogren 2001).

Master of Translation and Interpretation in China

While the EMCI was an effort by a number of existing interpreting programs in Europe to set standards and share best practices for interpreter training, China’s Master of Translation and Interpretation (MTI), a professional degree launched in 2007, was an enormous endeavor to start hundreds of new programs from scratch and build up a discipline in translation and interpretation (T&I) education. China’s T&I education, like the country’s economy, has experienced rapid development in the past few decades, but for a long time there had been a traditional reliance on undergraduate and graduate foreign language programs for the training of translators and interpreters (Mu 1999; Zhong 2007; Cai 2012). In spite of the efforts of a few successful professional T&I programs in the country which turned out well trained translators and interpreters, the number was too small to meet the country’s growing need for translation and interpretation. The shortage of professional translators and interpreters, plus the unremitting efforts made by leading T&I educators to push for graduate level professional training in translation and interpretation, led to a decision by the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council (China’s executive branch) in May 2007 to set up the Master of Translation and Interpretation (MTI). It was an important and historic decision hailed as “a milestone in the development of translator and interpreter education in China, as it provides an important approach to the training of professional translators and interpreters and sets the course of action for the future development of translation and interpretation as a discipline” (Zhong 2007). The ensuing explosive growth of T&I programs in the country was unparalleled. As of the end of November, 2011, there were 159 MTI programs in the country, of which 100 offer interpreting courses.

Achieving consistency in a way that ensures quality of training is a huge challenge for the founders of this professional degree. In its “Plan for the Establishment of the Master of Translation and Interpretation,” the Degrees Committee sets, among other things, the goal of the degree and general requirements on candidate and faculty profiles, admission tests as well as graduation requirements (completion of courses and thesis) (ADC 2007). A national steering committee (China National Committee for MTI Education, or CNMTI for short) was established when the degree was first launched in 2007, with a secretariat put in place to handle the coordination of activities among member universities. CNMTI has provided more specific guidelines to the MTI universities on curriculum development, in which it proposed a list of required and elective courses, with the number of credits specified for each course. In addition, it has set the requirements on the length of the program, faculty composition, interpreting practice time and internships. The MTI is designed as a two-year post-graduate program which must offer a minimum of 30 credits of courses, equivalent to a year’s full-time study, and plan for no less than 100 hours of practice time for interpreting. For admission, students must first take a centralized test in political affairs, followed by entrance exams designed and administered by each MTI university. Upon completion of their course work, students must submit and defend a thesis before they can be awarded the MA degree in either translation or interpretation (CNMTI 2007).

Although the MTI has been designed as a two-year program, course load varies among the universities. Some programs have followed the minimum requirement of 30 credits and offered...
courses in the first year, leaving the second year for internships and thesis writing. Most of the universities, however, have chosen the three-semester model, with the last semester for internships and thesis. A small number of programs keep their students in class for four semesters, but require them to complete their thesis before they graduate. In a few rare cases, programs have decided to offer four full semesters of courses, plus one more semester for internships and thesis writing (CNMTI 2013).

China’s MTI program has set goals that are much broader than that of EMCI which focuses on the training of conference interpreters. MTI interpreting programs may choose to train conference interpreters, or interpreters for non-conference settings, such as community interpreting, liaison interpreting, or military interpreting, for example, depending on the institution’s strengths (Zhong 2007). Given the number of the programs and the fact that many have started from scratch, there were concerns that training may not be done properly and there may be discrepancies among the MTI programs in the implementation of the guidelines. For the past six years since the advent of the MTI degree, there have been a number of activities that aimed at achieving consistency and improving quality within the MTI framework, such as the annual meetings of CNMTI, training of trainers programs and teaching demonstrations, and the larger and more extensive training of trainers programs jointly run by CNMTI and the Translators Association of China (CNMTI 2013).

More importantly, in 2011 CNMTI decided to set up a program evaluation committee, which developed a set of procedures and indicators for the review and evaluation of existing MTI programs. The current MTI programs will all be reviewed and evaluated against detailed and specific criteria in six major areas with 20 sub-categories and 47 indicators (He 2012). It is important to note that the indicators set for the review process are more detailed and extensive, and in some cases, more stringent than the general guidelines provided by either the State Council Academic Degrees Committee or CNMTI when the degree was first established. In addition to qualitative indicators, there are also a number of quantitative indicators on faculty profile and student practice time. For instance, 80% of the faculty must have professional experience in either translation or interpreting and each student must have completed 400 recorded hours of practice by the time of graduation.

By publishing the criteria for evaluation with more specific and robust indicators, CNMTI meant to help underperforming programs improve and catch up, and to provide a set of procedures, criteria and guidelines that will facilitate the disciplinary development of the MTI program (He, 2012). Specific quantitative targets, for instance the number of practice hours, could go a long way to improve effectiveness of training, if seriously enforced.

The role of international organizations to push for professional training of the highest quality

The United Nations and the European Union, the two largest users of interpreter services in the world, have each carried out activities to support professional training of conference interpreters. The Directorate General for Interpretation (DG Interpretation) of the European Commission, which used to offer its own six-month internal training course, is now working with universities in the member countries and candidate countries of the European Union, as well as countries outside the EU, to support conference interpreter training of the highest quality. DG Interpretation provides pedagogical assistance to universities in various forms, including sending experienced interpreters to help improve teaching, sending interpreters to sit on examination boards, providing teaching tools developed by DG Interpretation or organizing university study visits to DG Interpretation. The Directorates General for Interpretation of the European
Commission and the European Parliament have also jointly provided grants to support training in conference interpreting. In addition, DG Interpretation holds a universities conference every year with participants from universities, national governments, and international and European institutions, to discuss issues relating to conference interpreting and share best practices (DG Interpretation 2013).

With the same commitment to high standards for translators and interpreters, the United Nations initiated an outreach program that focuses on collaboration with academic training institutions but is open to all other institutional partners that are interested in promoting and enhancing training and education in the field of conference services. Since April 2008, the United Nations has signed Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with 22 leading universities in the world (UN DGACM 2013). Within the framework of the MOU, the United Nations provides audio/video files as teaching materials and sends experienced interpreters to universities to help with teaching. In addition, the United Nations also holds a bi-annual conference of the MOU universities to encourage pedagogical cooperation and exchanges between the United Nations and the MOU universities. These conferences serve as a useful platform for the participants to share experiences and best practices, which has provided an impetus to interpreter training and research in the MOU universities (Chai and Zhang 2013).

CIUTI (Conférence Internationale Permanente d’Instituts Universitaires de Traducteurs et Interprètes), an organization established more than 50 years ago by a few leading universities in Europe, also plays an important role in the field of T&I education. The organization now has 45 university members in 19 countries. Although membership is in principle open to all institutions of higher education offering programs in translation and interpreting, universities applying for CIUTI membership must go through a stringent admission procedure that involves quality control of curriculum, research, infrastructure and resources. During the application process, candidate schools will also be visited by two CIUTI experts who will conduct an on-site evaluation of teaching, research, and facilities, and will attempt to resolve any outstanding questions raised by the Admission Commission.

In addition to its annual general assembly open to members only, the organization began the CIUTI Forum in 2009, which has become an annual conference for stakeholders in T&I training, research, and practice to meet and discuss T&I-related problems and solutions, current trends, and anticipated developments. Recent topics have included the role of languages in a changing global market, market-oriented T&I training, and translation-quality issues (see www.ciuti.org).

As the only international organization that is exclusively dedicated to conference interpreting, the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) sets professional and ethical standards for the profession and promotes the working conditions that high quality interpreting requires. Naturally, AIIC also attaches great importance to the quality of interpreter training programs. Although the system of stars rating the compliance of training programs with the quality criteria set by AIIC (Niska 2005) is no longer in use, AIIC has continued its periodic surveys of interpreting schools and programs. Information about the school or program may be submitted to AIIC through the survey, and if the following criteria are met, the school or program will be included in the Directory of Interpreting Schools and Programs, a data base of best practices:

- The course is only open to post-graduate students
- An aptitude test must be conducted before course begins (one year) or at an early stage in the course for longer courses
The course is taught by conference interpreters

The curriculum must include instruction in both consecutive and simultaneous interpretation

The curriculum must be at least two semesters (one academic year) long

In addition, AIIC has also made best practice recommendations on faculty and student profile, the level of the training, the final exams and the composition of the jury (AIIC 2013).

Given AIIC’s unique position as the only international organization for conference interpreters, its best practice recommendations serve as useful guidelines to interpreting schools and programs as they engage in professional training of interpreters.

**Short courses and non-degree programs**

Another important phenomenon in interpreter training in the last decade is the increase of short courses, workshops, seminars, non-degree programs as well as certificate programs. These programs are offered with various lengths, from a one-day workshop to a certificate program that runs for a semester, a year or even longer. Such programs can be offered by universities, government agencies, professional organizations, interpreting agencies or companies and serve a broader audience than traditional degree programs, including active professionals in the T&I fields. Courses may range from basic interpreting courses for beginners to more advanced training for practicing professional interpreters. The most common programs include:

a Refresher courses for practicing interpreters for a specific skill, for instance, working into a B language, note-taking for consecutive interpretation, simultaneous interpreting, etc.

b Workshops or seminars on topics related to interpreting, such as terminology management for interpreting, remote interpreting technologies, computer assisted translation, etc.

c Basic interpreting courses for different settings of interpreting, for instance, court interpreting, medical interpreting, community interpreting, telephone interpreting, etc.

d Customized training courses for organizations, such as government agencies, and/or large multinational companies that have a need for interpreters.

e Certificate programs that provide specialized training in a more systematic manner.

**Short courses**

In general, the most salient feature of a short program is its flexibility. It is flexible in course design, which includes the duration of the program, course content, and the means of delivery. It is flexible for a number of obvious reasons. The short duration of the program makes it possible for people to get a leave from their jobs to take part in the training. It also helps to reduce costs and thus makes the program more affordable than a commitment to a degree program. In addition, goals and objectives of training for short programs are much easier to define, which is another important feature. With clearly defined goals and objectives, training is done in a more focused and intensive manner, for instance, in consecutive interpretation or court interpreting, in a short period of time.

There are, of course, challenges for short programs. First is the conflict between convenience and effectiveness. Programs are often designed for the convenience of the participants, to be delivered in a few days so that people can take time from work and participate. This works fine for workshops or seminars which deal with knowledge on a specific topic, such as technologies used in interpreting, terminology management for interpreters, but for developing the skills of
interpreting, intensive short programs often leave little time for reflection, practice and improvement. In addition, it is often difficult to implement any criteria or procedures for screening and assessment in a short course due to its limited length, thus leading to varied experiences and skills of participants. However, in order to provide meaningful training in interpreting skills and competence with effective results, there are short programs are delivered over time, in several segments, with adequate time reserved in between segments of training for more practice and digestion. For example, face-to-face classes may be held over the weekend, and homework assignments can be provided for practice in between classes for more effective training. Or in a blend program, learning in the classroom may be supported by online learning activities which keep the participants engaged throughout the program (see examples discussed in Sections 1.2.2 and 1.2.3). Short programs, in whatever forms, have fulfilled a considerable portion of the demand for training, and are likely to continue to do so, given the need and desire for trained professionals.

Certificate programs

A certificate program may be long or short, but an important criteria is that in a certificate program (unless restricted by law in some countries), participants must go through a screening process to be enrolled, complete course work and course exams or other forms of evaluation and obtain a performance-based certificate, which is a major distinction from short-term intensive training programs that issue a certificate of completion to every participant. Certificate programs are offered as part of continuing education to working professionals, or as formative interpreter training with full-time students. Universities often run credit-bearing certificate programs at the graduate level, for one semester or a year focusing on basic interpreting training, or more specialized training in a specific area, such as community interpreting. In the case of certificate programs organized by organizations, courses do not provide academic credit, but may focus on similar areas of training. In a few exceptional cases, certificate programs set more stringent criteria for admission than degree programs. One example is the Graduate Institute of Interpretation and Translation of the Shanghai International Studies University, which offers, in addition to its MTI program, a very rigorous stand-alone two-year graduate level certificate program in conference interpreting. Students are selected through extremely competitive exams. As they complete their first year of training, students must pass a “qualifying examination” in order to advance to the second year. At the end of the two-year intensive training, students are tested in consecutive and simultaneous interpretation for both A–B and B–A directions in front of a test panel that consists of faculty members, senior interpreters and representatives from the United Nations and European Union before they are finally awarded a professional certificate signed by the panel members, not a degree.

One notable development in the last decade is the emphasis on advanced and formal training of interpreters beyond the graduate level in a certificate program, usually for the purpose of further training or job preparation, on the assumption that some of the graduates, even those from graduate level interpreting programs, are not yet ready for the market at the time graduation. The Faculty of Translation and Interpreting of the University of Geneva, for instance, used to offer a one-semester Complementary Certificate in Conference Interpreting, a “top-up” program open for people who have already had an MA in conference interpreting or an equivalent degree and wish to add a new passive language to their language combination or strengthen one of the languages of their interpretation degree. The program is no longer available, but the training continues, although in a different form. The three-semester MA interpreting program is using a
4th semester to provide students and graduates with similar “top-up” training in conference interpreting to prepare for jobs at international organizations (see Chapter 11 on conference interpreting) (FTI 2013). In a similar effort, the Training Center of the China International Publication Group (CIPG) just launched a nine-month advanced training program in March 2014 in translation and interpreting for translators and interpreters affiliated with government agencies. Participants in the program are supposed to be practicing translators or interpreters, who may have already received formal training at school, but will join this continuing education program to enhance job performance. All participants have been selected through screening tests, and will meet in intensive training sessions, but the face-to-face training will not be held in consecutive sessions. There must be sufficient time left between the sessions for the participants to practice their skills while completing their online homework assignments (see www.cipgtraining.net).

**Online learning**

Online learning has brought paradigm shifts in education in many aspects. The convenience and affordability of online education has greatly expanded the access to education; and educational institutions are no longer the sole providers of education as online courses or programs can be offered by all kinds of institutions and entities. For these reasons, online interpreting courses and programs have been in a very dynamic and fluid situation. A simple Google search for “online interpreting programs” could yield hundreds of results about medical interpreting, legal interpreting, community interpreting, conference interpreting, etc. Programs are provided by universities, interpreter agencies, non-profit organizations, for-profit companies, hospitals, and even courts.

Currently, interpreting training takes place in different forms of online learning environment. There are 100% online courses, programs or webinars, mostly web-based courses with content for basic interpreting training, or for a specific type of interpreting, such as medical, legal or community interpreting. At the same time, there are also hybrid or blended courses or programs, with part of the instruction offered on-site and part online. Thanks to online learning, interpreter training can be provided to a much broader audience, and to places where traditional training may not be possible. For instance, the Interpreting Department of the Faculty of Translation and Interpretation (FTI) of the University of Geneva, in a pioneering and innovative effort in interpreter training, has developed online courses to train humanitarian interpreters in zones of crisis and war. The courses are offered in modules that cover professional ethics, skill development in consecutive and simultaneous interpreting, basic security, and other areas according to needs analysis with international humanitarian organizations. The online portion of the course are provided through FTI’s existing Virtual-institute which has provided an open and collaborative learning environment for the trainees. FTI has, for the first time, designed a learning environment specifically for use on mobile devices bearing in mind the myriad connectivity issues that are to be encountered in the field, while exploring and field testing innovative didactic solutions in hybrid learning (synchronous and asynchronous modes, online and offline) (Moser-Mercer et al. 2014).

Online learning has logically become an effective tool for continuing education as it provides a learning environment where training can be done for an extended period of time. It provides the convenience and the necessary time needed for serious training. In a blend or hybrid interpreting course, participants can benefit from offline face-to-face classroom instructions as well as self-paced online learning activities, with sufficient time planned for practice, reflection and improvement. Even for 100% online programs, face-to-face interactions can be achieved through synchronous online activities such as video conferencing, or discussions over other media.
Information technology has not only made online learning possible, but has also gone a long way in facilitating teaching and learning. Learning Management Systems (LMS) are commonly used at educational institutions to augment on-campus courses. Leading LMS systems such as Blackboard, Moodle and Desire2Learn are widely used for course management and documentation, among other things. In an online learning environment, students are provided with a platform where they can follow the course work, take assignments, practice and engage in collaborative learning. They can practice with a live speech posted by the instructor, or a speech downloaded from an online speech bank that contains hundreds of hours of speeches in audio/video format for interpreting practice. Making a trip to the teacher’s office to submit tapes of interpreting practice has been replaced by a few clicks on the website.

When distance education was provided in the past, its purpose was “to provide instruction in places and times that are convenient for the learners rather than the teachers or teaching institutions” (Moore and Kearsley 1996). While this statement is to a large extent still valid almost 20 years later, there may be an exception in the case of interpreter training as sharing faculty resources could be one essential purpose for using the online technology. As interpreter training requires instructors who have both professional interpreting and teaching experiences, faculty who meet these criteria are often in great demand. In this case, online technology can make it possible for students from two or more universities across the country or the world to share one instructor in a virtual classroom. Or an instructor may teach online when he/she travels on a professional interpreting assignment or for some other reason cannot be physically on campus for one or more classes. With online learning/teaching technologies, the means of course delivery becomes more flexible, allowing programs to use instructors whom they would otherwise not be able to hire given geographical distance.

It should be noted that many of the short courses, non-degree or certificate programs, including online courses are designed for training community interpreters in different settings, which reflect an inconsistent and uneven landscape for training interpreters in non-conference settings. Community interpreting has indeed experienced encouraging development in the past two decades with the number of interpreters increasing, standards having been set and professional organizations established in many countries, but as Bancroft indicates in Chapter 14 of this volume, there is a dire shortage of training programs for community interpreters. The reasons she cites are that the payment for interpreting service is too little to justify the time and money for professional training and that training is often costly to implement, even for universities. The professionalization or institutionalization of community interpreter training is indeed a trend as many universities have set up professional training programs, often at the graduate level. One good example is the MA program in Intercultural Communicating and Public Service Interpreting and Translation set up by the University of Alcala in 2000, which was finally incorporated into the European Master’s in Translation network in 2009 (Valero-Garcés 2011). China’s MTI program is another example. According to the guidelines set by the CNMTI, schools offering the MTI programs may choose to provide training in conference interpreting or non-conference interpreting depending on their own strengths and resources available (Zhong 2007). Another notable effort in this direction was the discussions on curriculum development for community interpreter training (Sawyer 2004; Angelelli 2006) to propose a more comprehensive or holistic approach to training community interpreters which includes not only interpreting skills development, but also non-skill training such as ethics, setting specific knowledge, inter-personal communication skills, etc. Such curriculum design has indeed laid the theoretical foundation for more professional training of community interpreters at a more advanced level.
Increased emphasis on training of trainers

While we readily disagree that anyone who speaks a foreign language can interpret, we cannot agree either that anyone who interprets can teach. It is a widely accepted principle that interpreter training should be ideally done by professional interpreters, but even for experienced conference interpreters, they “also need to develop a self-reflective approach to their own predispositions and an understanding of how to transfer that knowledge and experience to beginners” (Diriker 2013). Likewise, training cannot, as it often is, done by language teachers with no or limited interpreting experience. Training of trainers (ToT) is essential for the success of an interpreter training program and has thus become a major development in the last decade.

Most of the training of trainers is conducted by organizations and universities and it takes different forms, including lectures, seminars, workshops, conferences, courses and certificate or degree programs. Training may range from a day or a few days, to a few months, or one or two years, depending on the nature of the training.

Training of trainers by AIIC

AIIC, which offered one of the earliest ToT workshops, has played an important role in this area. AIIC takes it as its own responsibility to provide training to conference interpreters who are interpreter trainers or are interested in teaching interpreting. AIIC Training organizes seminars for trainers each year, with increased frequency in recent years. In 2013 alone, AIIC Training conducted six seminars for trainers, including one in Beijing, the first such seminar held by AIIC in Asia. The seminars were mostly led by conference interpreters who have years of professional interpreting and teaching experiences. A wide range of topics were discussed at these seminars, including working into B languages (see Chapter 11 on conference interpreting), teaching consecutive interpreting in the first six months, information technology and interpreter training, matching interpreting classes with students’ needs, relevance of theory in interpreter education and best practice in interpreter training (AIIC 2013). In addition, AIIC runs training webinars on different topics for people who cannot participate in the training seminars.

Training of trainers in China

As the country with the largest growth of interpreter training in the last decade, China has a huge need for ToT. The Translators Association of China (TAC) has made extensive efforts in the training of trainers for interpretation. TAC started its first teacher training program in the summer of 2004, with close to 300 participants for both translation and interpretation. After the establishment of the Master of Translation and Interpretation program in 2007, the summer ToT became a joint program run by the TAC and CNMTI which made continuing education a requirement for MTI instructors (TAC 2003). It has become the largest ToT program in the world in terms of the number of participants (close to 2,000 people have gone through these programs) and faculty (close to 20 instructors in each program) (Bao 2012).

The ToT program in China consists of two one-week courses (one for translation and one for interpretation), focused on general topics such as basic concepts and principles of translation/interpretation, pedagogy, curriculum and course development, text selection, assessment and feedback. Language specific courses have been a major feature of these training programs since the majority of the participants have one common language combination: English and Chinese. Courses have therefore been designed on such topics as how to teach English–Chinese translation, sight translation, consecutive and simultaneous interpretation. In the 2009 summer ToT
program, an interpreting skill development course was added as a module to provide the participants without professional interpreting experience with an exposure to the field and help them acquire first-hand practical experience. This was a particularly important feature added to help address the need of non-professional interpreters and translators teaching in the new MTI programs and other translation and interpreting programs. The summer ToT provides an opportunity for the participants to engage in discussions not only on specific teaching methods, but more on the process of teaching as a systematic and comprehensive approach with procedures and norms that must be performed properly and cannot be circumvented (Bao 2009).

**Certificate or degree programs for interpreter trainers**

Systematic training of trainers is also offered by some of the leading interpreting schools in the form of a certificate or degree program. The FTI of the University of Geneva, for instance, offered the first academic interpreter trainers program, initially as a face-to-face Certificate for Interpreter Trainers launched in 1996, and later developed into the Masters of Advanced Studies in Interpreter Training. This is a 12-month blended training program that comprises nine modules covering distance learning, interpreting process, interpreting expertise development, research project design and implementation, curriculum, evaluation, etc. (FTI 2013).

**Visiting scholar and open house programs**

Training of trainers is also done in forms other than traditional workshop or seminar instruction. Many universities have programs which welcome visiting scholars who stay for one or two semesters to observe or audit classes while doing research on topics related to teaching pedagogy. Through these programs, visiting scholars may observe in close range how classes are conducted, or audit a class if they are interested in first-hand experience as a learner. They also have the opportunity to talk to colleagues at these universities about their pedagogical practices. The CNMTI started an Open House Week for instructors of translation and interpretation. The Graduate Institute of Interpreting and Translation of Shanghai International Studies University and the Graduate School of Translation and Interpretation Studies of Guangdong Foreign Studies University, at the request of CNMTI, each offered an open house week in November and December 2013, as a form of training to instructors from other universities. During the week, the visitors observed regular classes, attended lectures arranged for the visit, and engaged in discussions with faculty and students (CNMTI 2013).

**How interpreters are trained**

**Programs and schools**

With hundreds of courses and programs for interpreting being offered in different parts of the world, there is indeed much to choose from when it comes to interpreting training. There are short non-degree courses and programs designed for continuing education or intensive training in a specific area, undergraduate programs to prepare students with foundational knowledge and skills for interpreting, and graduate level programs that provide professional training of interpreters in a more systematic manner. While these courses and programs are all designed with the goal to help students develop interpreting skills or become competent interpreters, the level and rigor of the training could vary depending on the specific objectives of the program. For most
People who are interested in becoming a professional interpreter, though, formal training at the graduate level is the way to go, which is why we have seen over the past few decades the emergence of a large number of MA programs in translation and interpreting throughout the world. These programs have received a great deal of attention from employers and professional organizations.

Professional training is provided at the graduate level for interpreting in both conference and non-conference settings, in degree or non-degree programs, but in most cases in MA programs that run between one and two years. For training in conference interpreting, AIIC (International Association of Conference Interpreters) has published criteria for best practices, including the level of the training, the length of the program, the composition of the faculty, courses and exams (see Section 1.1.3), which may serve as useful guidance for the selection of schools or programs for training. Similar guidelines have also been provided in the core curriculum of the European Masters in Conference Interpreting (EMCI, see Section 1.1.1). The China National Committee for MTI Education, too, has developed guidelines for its Masters in Translation and Interpretation programs, which provide training in broad categories of interpreting settings (see Section 1.1.2). Major employers of interpreters such as the United Nations and the European Union have been pushing for high quality training of conference interpreters through their alliances with universities (see Section 1.1.3), and the CIUTI, the international association of schools of translation and interpretation, has enforced stringent criteria for its membership (see Section 1.1.3).

Curriculum

Curriculum development is to a large extent determined by the goals and objectives of the program and the length of training. An interpreter training program at the graduate level offers a curriculum which prepares future interpreters in all the skills and expertise associated with interpreting. A typical curriculum consists of courses in sight translation, consecutive interpretation and simultaneous interpretation as well as other related courses such as public speaking, translation and interpreting theories, interpretation as a profession, international organizations, etc. In most programs, translation is also offered either as a required course or an elective. As a rule, the majority of the courses in an interpreter training program are practice-intensive courses that focus on the acquisition of skills, although these courses can be offered for different lengths of time. In a two-year program, for instance, consecutive interpretation (see Chapter 6 on consecutive interpreting) may be offered for two semesters or in some cases for three or four semesters. Simultaneous interpretation (see Chapter 5 on simultaneous interpreting) often runs for two semesters in the second year after a full year’s training in consecutive interpretation, although in some cases it could start as early as the second semester. In many programs, sight translation is offered at the same time as consecutive interpretation, starting from the first semester and running for one or two semesters (see Chapter 9 on sight translation). Consecutive interpretation and sight translation are both offered in the first semester as introductory courses to interpretation where students learn about the basic concepts and develop initial skills of interpreting. Consecutive interpretation, in particular, is a major component in an interpreting curriculum as it is not only an important interpreting skill in its own right, but also a necessary foundation for simultaneous interpreting as students learn to analyze and organize ideas. In addition, consecutive interpretation is considered as a valuable course that can provide a useful diagnostic tool “to analyze student performance and locate his/her strengths and weaknesses, in particular regarding faulty comprehension and insufficient mastery of the target language” (Gile 2005).
Assessment

Assessment is an important component of an interpreter training program that serves as quality assurance (see Chapter 24 on assessment). Again, the kind of assessment to be designed and administered will depend on the goals and learning objectives set by the program. While there are short and non-degree programs that provide a participatory experience to the students without testing, many of the formal interpreter training programs, especially the certificate and degree programs, carry out systematic evaluation and assessment in a few key areas. For a conference interpreting program, for instance, applicants must take an entrance exam or a diagnostic test which looks at a candidate’s proficiency in the native language and working language(s), analytical skills and critical thinking capabilities. Entrance exams are usually designed by the school or program itself, although university consortiums like the EMCI in Europe and MTI in China have set guidelines for the form and content of the entrance exams (see Sections 1.1.1 and 1.1.2).

Depending on the length of the training, many programs also administer an intermediate test, usually at the end of the second semester of a two-year program as a qualifying test for entrance into the second year of study. In some programs, this test has been integrated as part of the course final exams of the second semester.

The final or exit exam, or professional exam as it is called in some schools, is considered an important part of an interpreter training program as this is the last gatekeeper before the students are conferred the certificate or degree and enter the professional market. Again taking the conference interpreting program for example, the most common form of test is the professional exam, a result-oriented test in which the student’s performance is reviewed and evaluated by a jury. AIIC has recommended criteria for best practices in final exams (see Section 1.1.3), and EMCI has made detailed descriptions in its core curriculum of the forms and content of the exam as well as of the jury composition. For many of the degree programs for conference interpreting, this is the only exit requirement, although there are still other programs, including China’s MTI programs, which have an additional thesis requirement for graduation (see Section 1.1.2).

Constant feedback from instructors and peers in a year-long formal training program is another important form of assessment as it helps develop a collaborative learning environment where students not only learn from their instructors but also their peers.

Developing interpreting expertise

The first thing an interpreter needs to learn is to listen for meaning, not words, and it is the key to all modes of interpretation (Seleskovich and Lederer 1989). This serves as a foundation on which to build up the expertise of interpreting. The initial training is usually done through consecutive interpretation where students, through a number of exercises including consecutive interpreting without notes, learn how to listen, understand the logic of the speech and analyze information for meaning instead of simply doing transcoding. The non-interpreting exercises include but are not limited to paraphrasing, chunking sentences, summarizing major ideas, in the source or target language and will often run for a few weeks before note-taking is introduced. Students will take at least one or two semesters of consecutive interpreting training before simultaneous interpretation begins. This initial stage of training is necessary and important, as it helps students develop a cognitive approach to interpreting and therefore lays a solid foundation for training at a later stage. When note-taking is introduced after the initial training, students will feel more comfortable taking notes based on meaning and logic, and use the notes as cues to reconstruct the speech. These basic concepts and exercises are repeated and enhanced continuously throughout the training in consecutive interpreting.
The second important area in the development of interpreting expertise is cognitive load management. As Gile’s effort model (1995) suggests, interpreting is a multi-tasking process in which each task (listening, analyzing, reproducing) competes for the limited mental resources available (See Chapters 5 and 6 in this volume). When interpretation takes more than what is available, performance deteriorates. Therefore, an interpreter needs to expand his/her processing capacity using the limited mental resources, and an effective way to expand processing capacity is to reduce the effort required for each task. In interpreting training, students are encouraged to practice on a regular basis in order to achieve certain levels of speed, efficiency or automaticity with elements that can be retrieved with less effort, including terminology, numbers, set structures, etc. Automaticity can help improve speed and smoothness of operations, reduce cognitive demand on operations and releases cognitive resources for higher functions (Liu 2012).

As Moser-Mercer (2008) suggests, however, this fluency provides only one dimension of the interpreting expertise. On the basis of the “routine expertise”, learners need to develop the “adaptive expertise”, to efficiently apply basic domain knowledge and to develop innovation skills that will help them solve routine problems as well as identify new problems. To develop the adaptive expertise, learners need to be “exposed to learning environments that encourage meta-cognitive learning, put less emphasis on breadth of knowledge and more on how knowledge can be effectively organized and how problems can be solved, rather than being presented with ready-made solutions” (Moser-Mercer 2008).

The importance of practice

There is no doubt that practice is an essential component of any interpreter training program that cannot be overemphasized. Performance improves as a consequence of experience and deliberate practice (Ericsson 2006). Without consistent and deliberate practice, it is simply impossible to gain a skill or develop an expertise. EMCI has set specific requirement for student practice time in its core curriculum (see Section 1.1.1), and so have China’s MTI programs (see Section 1.1.2).

Interpreting practice takes place both in and outside class, but for different purposes. Although the majority of the courses in an interpreter training program are practice-intensive, practice in class is usually used as a diagnostic tool to check student performance, identify issues, and analyze each student’s strengths and weaknesses. It is also a means by which instructors introduce and discuss strategies and techniques of interpreting. No matter how much time is spent in class for practice, it is not sufficient to allow the students to develop the level of speed, efficiency or automaticity as required in enhancing the capacity for information processing. Therefore after-class practice is essential. “Deliberate practice is a highly structured activity engaged in with the specific goal of improving performance” (Barr 2012). It helps to improve the quality of practice in the sense that practice is more organized with specific activities designed to tackle specific issues, and practice is done in the right sequence at appropriate levels of difficulty, with sufficient repetition. Consistent deliberate practice helps learners stretch performance beyond current capabilities, concentrate on critical aspects through repetition, correct specific weaknesses and increase the ability to control, self-monitor, and evaluate own performance and gain independence from teacher feedback (Liu 2012).

As it is often assumed that students themselves are responsible for their own practice, especially graduate students who are supposed to know how to study, practice is very often left in the hands of the students. But the truth is that it may take a while for students, especially in their first semester, to find the right approach to practice. Without specific assignments given by the instructor, students often do not know what to practice with and how. For the training to
produce the desired results, it is useful to integrate student self-study and practice into the curriculum and provide guidance accordingly. In some programs, students are given credit for self-study, and well-structured practice materials are provided.

**Conclusion**

Much has happened in interpreter training in the past 20 years. As courses and programs in interpreting have been offered in large numbers in different parts of the world, there have been consistent efforts by universities, professional associations and international organizations to push for professional standards and better quality in the training. By implementing stringent entrance exams for their staff interpreters, the United Nations and the European Union, as major employers of interpreters, have set high standards for conference interpreters. AIIC, the professional organization for conference interpreters, and CIUTI, the only association of schools of translation and interpretation in the world, have respectively set standards for interpreters and pushed for quality of training. The emergence of university consortiums such as the EMCI in Europe and the MTI in China has indicated a trend for cooperation among universities for better and effective professional training of interpreters at the graduate level. The MoU university conferences of the United Nations and the universities conference of DG Interpretation of the European Commission have provided useful and valuable platforms for dialogues between trainers and employers, in a joint effort to achieve the best quality in interpreter training. Although not much has been written in English language publications about activities in China, much has been happening in this country that has more than a third of the world’s translator and interpreter training programs. China has emerged as a major player in translator and interpreter education in the world.

While these are all encouraging developments in the field of interpreter training, a lot more needs to be done in order to make sure that interpreter training is done properly and professionally. In spite of the large numbers we have seen in terms of interpreting courses and programs, the quality of training is a goal yet to be achieved across the board. Having professional interpreters as trainers is indeed desirable, but even in programs staffed with experienced interpreters, there can be inconsistencies in teaching methods and procedures (Pöchhacker 1999). Things may be even worse with instructors who have limited teaching or professional experience. The training of trainers is necessary, for both experienced and novice instructors. Besides setting the goals, objectives and standards for training, consortiums of interpreting programs may perhaps also engage in educational infrastructure development that individual schools cannot do on their own. For instance, databases for teaching and practice materials can be developed and made available to members of the consortium for the benefit of both the instructors and students. Properly selected texts and speeches recommended to instructors in sequences based on degrees of difficulty and content will be a tremendous help to novice, as well as experienced, instructors and will serve as a framework of criteria within which teaching could be properly done. For the students, too, practicing with materials properly selected to suit the learning objectives could help make self-practice more efficient and effective.

**Further reading**


The author discusses the basic concepts and principles of translation and interpreting and presents the effort model in interpretation.
This book contains practical exercises for simultaneous interpreting which are useful to both interpreters in training and practicing interpreters.

Through a discussion of curriculum definitions, foundations and guidelines, the author suggests a framework based upon scientific and humanistic approaches – curriculum as process and as interaction.

### References


NON-PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETERS

Aída Martínez-Gómez

Introduction

Non-professional interpreters are individuals with a certain degree of bilingual competence who perform interpreting tasks on an ad hoc basis without economic compensation or prior specific training. Their awareness of the skills required to perform their interpreting duties correctly and the ethical constraints thereto is shaped by their own intuitions and subject to the expectations expressed by the parties to the encounters they mediate in. Most often they conduct their tasks individually and in isolation, which translates into little visibility, lack of group solidarity and prestige, and lack of public credibility, even if they may receive immediate social recognition by the monolingual speakers for whom they enable communication. In fact, every bilingual individual is a potential non-professional interpreter, as they are selected on the basis of their (apparent) competence in the two languages involved – spoken or signed – and their immediate availability.

Non-professional interpreters range thus from relatives or friends or acquaintances – including children – of a person requiring language mediation; to in-house employees at the institution where interpreting is needed; to volunteers belonging to a wide array of civil organizations; to virtually any passer-by. Their presence is evident in the homes of minority-language community members; and it is most frequent in public services, where the interpreting profession is still little institutionalized (in health care centres, welfare and government offices, schools, police stations, prisons, churches, etc). These interpreters are relatively visible in business contexts, especially local ones (banks, post offices, shops), but also in mass media; and their presence is sporadic but crucial in conflict or emergency situations. Non-professional interpreting even occurs in the most professionalized settings (i.e. conference or court interpreting).

Despite being an inherent feature of the daily lives of millions of citizens around the world, non-professional interpreting has traditionally been chastised by academics and practitioners alike. When untrained, unremunerated interpreters continue to be used for various reasons – availability, lack of funds, parties’ unawareness of resources at hand or preferences based on interpersonal grounds (e.g. trust) – especially in community settings, this means that standards remain inconsistent, market structures are threatened and professionalization is held back. Such tensions have been reflected in the scant research to date, where this issue has either been approached in passing within studies on professional interpreting, or foregrounded as the object of analysis in an attempt to evidence the dangers of such practices. Nevertheless, an emerging
A conceptual shift is giving birth to new avenues of research which address non-professional interpreting without preconceptions of what interpreting ‘should be’ – a movement that would ultimately enhance our comprehension of the field.

**Definition of terms**

Back in 1973, Brian Harris put forward a controversial hypothesis – that translation skill is coextensive with bilingualism – and thus coined a new term: **Natural translation**. In his view, natural translation is “the translating done in everyday circumstances by people who have had no special training for it” (Harris, 1977: 99). The people who do natural translation, besides being knowledgeable in two languages, have an innate extra set of skills which allows them to translate between these languages in both directions.

The concept of natural translation aroused strong opposition, but some of its tenets were accepted and elaborated upon. Toury’s notion of **native translation**, introduced in 1980, challenged Harris’s innateness hypothesis and focused on the acquisition of translational skills as part of the (unconscious) social and cognitive development of the individual, based on observation, experience and exposure to socially accepted norms (Toury, 1995: excursus C).

Despite these early efforts, this area of research remained underexplored in interpreting studies. Fortunately, this was not a phenomenon exclusive to our field. In 1987, a sociolinguistic study by education scholar Sheila Shannon used the label “language brokering,” a concept later defined by Tse (1995: 180) as “interpretation and translation between linguistically and culturally different parties,” which deviates from traditional notions of interpreting in that it entails influencing messages and may involve decision-making on behalf of one or both parties. This term has mainly been used to refer to **child language brokers**, both hearing children of deaf adults (CODAs) and children from migrant communities recently established in a new host country, who are known to translate and, mostly, interpret for their families and communities on a daily basis (see Chapter 17 on interpreting in education).

More recently, different terms highlighting different conceptual features have been used to designate this practice and those who perform it: informal/impromptu interpreting, family/lay/untrained interpreters, etc. **Ad hoc interpreting** has been widely used as an umbrella term to encompass any kind of interpreting done by unpaid, untrained individuals on the spot. However, some have recently argued for a reconceptualization of the term, widening its scope to all “interpreting initiatives that take place in a context which cannot be catered for by conventional services for reasons that may be geopolitical, socio-economic and/or socio-professional” (Boeri, 2012: 129), thus including, among others, volunteer services provided by expert professionals.

The effective coinage of the term “non-professional interpreters” could be considered a 21st century phenomenon, the landmarks of which have been the institution of the international conference series on Non-Professional Interpreting and Translation (whose first edition was held at the University of Bologna at Forlì in 2012) or the publication of a special issue of the journal *The Translator* entitled *Non-professionals Translating and Interpreting. Participatory and Engaged Perspectives* (2012). However, the notion of non-professional interpreting cannot be framed without defining “professional”. According to Rudvin (2007: 51), the main requirements for **professional status** are remuneration, training and a “superior competence” (or *expertise*), validated objectively by a community of peers and put in practice for reasons other than one’s own profit. In practice, however, these three characteristics rarely come together at the same level in those working in less institutionalised settings (compare, for instance, trained interpreters who volunteer, interpreting interns, and self-taught interpreters, e.g. terps and fixers in conflict zones). (See Chapter 19 on interpreting in conflict zones.)
The following pages attempt to shed light on all these profiles, which deviate to some extent from the traditional clear-cut image of the “professional interpreter.” Deciding if and how to compartmentalize these realities or, on the contrary, to start understanding professionalization as a continuum where all segments are equally relevant to the discipline, remains open for further scholarly debate.

**Early developments**

The history of interpreting is a history of non-professional interpreters (see Chapter 1 on the history of interpreting). Tracing its evolution, however, is fraught with difficulty. The ephemeral nature of orality limits sources of information to scattered references in the annals of history which have been first filtered by chroniclers, as direct accounts from interpreters in the shape of diaries, letters and memoirs are unfortunately scarce. That filtering process especially affects many of the early non-professional interpreters (women, slaves, members of religious/ethnic minorities, etc.), whose social status did not seem to make them worthy of further historical representation (Delisle and Woodsworth, [1995] 2012: 247–8).

However incomplete the picture, enough evidence has reached our days to bear witness to the contribution of interpreters to the unfolding of history. They mediated in explorations and conquests, religious missions, diplomacy, war and commerce. They were also present in the intra-social development of history, although records of those activities are even more scarce: in the administration of justice, in educational contexts, in community religious practice or in the circulation of scientific knowledge. These interpreters were non-professionals: they were certainly not trained, and only in a few cases and in certain domains were they paid for their services. Competence, power differentials, allegiances, biases and the potential for betrayal were also sources of concern throughout interpreting history.

Even among non-professionals, a certain degree of institutionalization was sought through these historical periods, either through legal regulations dating back from the Middle Ages (e.g. *Leyes de las Indias*, see Chapter 1, this volume) or through the creation of the first specialized interpreting schools in the 17th century. This evolution consolidated in the mid-20th century with the appearance of university training programs, professional associations and early research initiatives, marking the coming of age of (conference) interpreting as a recognized profession.

Despite those advances, non-professional interpreters continued to bear the burden of language mediation for both spoken and sign languages in a myriad of settings, mainly community-based ones. Some tentative advances in terms of legal provisions and professional associations for sign language and court interpreters were made in the 1960s and 1970s – the milestones probably being the creation of what would later become the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf in 1965 or the enactment of the US Court Interpreters Act in 1978. However, it would not be until the late 1990s that professionalizing efforts would reach public service interpreting settings, until then the main domain of non-professional interpreters (see Chapters 7, 12, 13 and 14, this volume).

It was also in the late 1970s when Harris suggested the concept “natural translation” and explored the relationship between bilingualism and translational skill. By means of data gathered, either by himself or by previous researchers, through participant observation, experimental procedures and case studies, he was able to illustrate his approach with actual examples of children conducting successful interpretation tasks of some kind (Harris, 1977, 1980; Harris and Sherwood, 1978).

In that period of tentative advances, scholars also initiated empirical research on adult non-professional interpreters. These pioneering efforts were led by researchers outside Interpreting
Studies and addressed interpreting quality assessment in healthcare and mental health settings (Lang, 1975; Price, 1975; Launer, 1978; Marcos, 1979). Following a transcript-based analysis of errors in recorded interactions, it was observed that bilingual orderlies made significant errors with diagnostic consequences, most of which were attributable to poor foreign language competence or to deviations from the intermediary role to a primary participant footing.

Similar findings about interpreting errors leading to misdiagnoses resulted from further research by medical scholars in the 1980s and early 1990s (Ebden et al., 1988; Vasquez and Javier, 1991). In this early research, interpreters in healthcare settings were seen as a homogeneous mass of non-professionals – relatives, friends and staff. As professionalization starts to make its way into community settings in the late 1990s, the research interests of healthcare scholars begin to shift towards the impact of language barriers, interpreting methods and modes, and types of interpreter in the assessment of interpreting quality and quality of medical care (Hornberger et al., 1997; Flores et al., 2003; among others).

In a similar light, but in the very different context of court interpreting, Schweda-Nicholson (1989) reviewed legal cases where different types of non-professional interpreters had been used, from spectators to defence attorneys. Insufficient linguistic and interpreting competence, lack of knowledge of the law and courtroom proceedings, and unawareness about ethical considerations (including management of conflicts of interest, personal biases or potential manipulations) jeopardize foreign language-speakers’ rights to due process and call for professional court interpreter training.

Aside from this main early research focus on the pitfalls of using non-professional interpreters in community settings, the role of the interpreter tentatively started to emerge as a new avenue of research (Knapp-Potthoff and Knapp, 1986, 1987). Since then, sociological, anthropological and sociolinguistic frameworks have allowed researchers to provide conceptual analyses of interpreter roles and to reflect on the tension caused by the mediator adopting a primary interlocutor position (see Chapter 4 on the evolution of interpreting research).

The first major conceptualization of the notion of child language brokering – and the actual coining of the term – emerged on the basis of sociological and educational foundations also in the late 1980s. In her ethnographic study on the everyday language use of US Latino school-children, Shannon (1987) identified situations where these children not only acted as language brokers but also advocated for their family interests in the process, which filled them with pride and contributed to their cognitive and social development.

Up until the mid-1990s, pioneering research on non-professional interpreters was mainly nested in other disciplines such as health sciences, linguistics, and anthropology, and had stirred little attention in interpreting studies. Approaches remained relatively self-contained in their own disciplines despite the potential for interdisciplinarity. However, these studies succeeded in problematising the status quo and foregrounding a few of the main issues that would constitute the core of this avenue of research in the upcoming years.

**Current situation**

The advent of community interpreting as an academic discipline (see Chapter 14, this volume), usually traced to the first Critical Link conference in 1995, inherently carried an “opening up” in interpreting studies towards non-professional interpreters. Much of the initial exploratory research on the state of the art of the emerging profession confirmed practice-based observations: community interpreting was, for the most part, non-professionals’ territory. These unpaid, untrained language mediators found themselves as study subjects almost by accident – often not because of an explicit interest in them, but because of their position at the heart of very intriguing
communicative encounters. The evolution of research on non-professional interpreters goes thus hand in hand with the evolution of community interpreting research. However, the next paragraphs exploring the main methods, topics and research findings to date also include significant contributions in the domain of child language brokering.

Methods

A variety of methods have been applied to the study of non-professional interpreters in the last two decades. Although from the late 1990s onwards, product-based methods lost their pre-eminence in favour of comprehensive interactional analyses of mediated encounters, a few error analyses remained, either to explore the underlying causes of error (Cambridge, 1999; Elderkin-Thompson et al., 2001) or to compare the performance of professional interpreters and bilingual staff (Flores et al., 2003; Gany et al., 2007).

Real discourse data also serve as the basis for interaction-oriented research mainly by interpreting studies scholars. Discourse and conversational analysis, and observation of situational and interpersonal dynamics (on occasion in the form of case studies), have been used to analyze non-professional interpreters’ strategies for rendering specific discourse elements (Meyer, 2001) and to describe typical interactional features (Pöchhacker and Kadric, 1999; Kouraogo, 2001; Jääskeläinen, 2003; Meyer, 2012).

This paradigm shift in favour of interactional dynamics is also reflected in the assessment of non-professional interpreters’ performance (see Chapter 24 on assessment for further discussion). Research now begins to incorporate all participants – including interpreters – in the evaluation of communication and interpretation success through surveys, interviews and, to a lesser extent, focus groups (e.g. Hornberger et al., 1997; Kuo and Fagan, 1999; Rhodes and Nocon, 2003; Alexander et al., 2004; Rosenberg et al., 2008; Schouten et al., 2012). In the particular case of child language brokering, research has typically foregrounded child language brokers as respondents in their studies, and focused on the impact of these practices on their social and cognitive development (Tse, 1995, 1996; McQuillan and Tse, 1995; Preston, 1996 for CODAs; Hall and Sham, 1998; Cohen et al., 1999; Valdés, 2003; Weisskirch, 2007).

A corollary of this interaction-oriented approach to research is the primacy of real-life data, as opposed to experiment-based studies (Cambridge, 1999; Gany et al., 2007). Furthermore, real-life interactions have encouraged comparative analyses of professional and non-professional interpreters’ performance, given their coexistence in most settings observed (Hornberger et al., 1997; Kuo and Fagan, 1999; Lee et al., 2002).

Topics and main findings

These diverse complementary methodologies have been geared, however, towards exploring a rather homogeneous array of topics. Against the backdrop of professionalization efforts, the central role played by quality assessment of non-professionals’ performance comes as no surprise. This key topic has been approached from different perspectives: the interpreter’s competence and skills, his/her participation status, and users’ and interpreters’ experiences.

Traditionally, interpreting research has supported the motto “interpreters are made, not born” (Mackintosh, 1999). Non-professional interpreters are often subject to criticism because of rudimentary competence in their foreign language and even in their native one, especially in terms of terminology. Ebden et al. (1988) highlighted important mistranslations or omissions of medical terms, due to lack of understanding, unawareness of equivalent terms, or cultural differences (conceptual or taboo-related). Similar deviations are found by Meyer (2001), who
further analyzes the strategies non-professional interpreters deploy to compensate for such difficulties: use of calques, non-terminological forms, deictic expressions and non-verbal language, which show creativity but are not always successful.

Terminological difficulties usually reflect lack of knowledge of the subject matter at hand, be it medical, legal or otherwise – another common feature among most non-professional interpreters. Exceptions to this trend are some staff members who interpret at their workplaces, whose institutional and technical knowledge can be an asset for their interpreting activities. Despite this, terminological competence cannot be assumed (especially if they have been exposed to only one of their working languages in professional contexts) nor interactional factors disregarded. In fact, shifts in participation status seem to occur when nurses steer communication in particular directions according to their own perceptions of medical hypotheses, be it either by editing patients’ utterances (Elderkin-Thompson et al., 2001: 1352) or by following their own line of inquiry while the doctor is unavailable (Meyer, 2001: 100).

Another type of expert knowledge that non-professional interpreters seem to lack relates to metalinguistic awareness. Their ability to provide functionally equivalent utterances is hindered by their insufficient understanding of how certain discursive practices contribute to achieving communicative purposes. Bührig and Meyer (2004) observe that interpreters’ failure to reproduce the use of modal verbs, passives and indefinite pronouns in specific utterances diminishes patient decision-making autonomy in medical interviews for informed consent, whereas Pöchhacker and Kadric (1999) report alterations of the illocutionary force of primary participants’ utterances. The ubiquity of such a deficiency has been contested, however, by studies on child language brokers, who display high levels of metalinguistic maturity in monitoring interactions for potential conflicts, and consequently performing conscious transformations (Valdés, 2003: ch. 5).

Non-professional interpreters’ underdeveloped skills in the above-mentioned areas amount, in fact, to a very small fraction of the concerns voiced in the field. Alterations and disruptions caused by their shifts in participation status have been identified as the most common cause of communication breakdown. The adoption of a primary participant status has been widely censured as it has been often related to disempowerment of the parties to the interaction. Bilingual nurses’ appropriation of leading roles in medical interviews, as described above, or a hospital cleaner’s adoption of a co-therapeutic role in a speech therapy session (Pöchhacker and Kadric, 1999), make service providers inadvertently lose “control of their professional (inter)action to such an extent that they can no longer ensure the quality and effectiveness of their work” (Pöchhacker and Kadric, 1999: 177). At the other end of the spectrum, members of linguistic minorities are often criticized for siding with their fellow countrymen and advocating actively on their behalf. As early as 1986, Knapp-Pothoff and Knapp described how a bilingual student negotiates solutions to the minority-language speakers’ problems in side conversations with the service provider and acts as an adviser himself in legal advice sessions at a community centre – a behaviour which seems to be very common among child language brokers (Hall and Sham, 1998). Indeed, in group loyalties and allegiances may influence non-professional interpreters’ performance, either consciously or unconsciously. As Tipton (2011: 25) explains, “the level of solidarity that emerges as a result of membership of a particular group can influence the (untrained) interpreter’s allegiance in the interpreter-mediated exchange and the interpreted outputs obtained.”

In many cases, changes of footing – deliberate or not – appear in the context of face-threatening events in the interaction. Face-saving strategies are commonly used by non-professional interpreters in order to protect their own social image and/or that of any of the primary interlocutors’. Harris and Sherwood (1978) illustrate this with the example of a young natural interpreter mediating between her father and his colleagues in a business setting. When both her face and
her father’s are threatened by a cultural asymmetry in the way of conducting business between Italians and Canadians, she tones down her father’s utterances in order to avoid conflict.

Less evident face threats, such as the use of taboo words and the personal nature of the information conveyed in a medical consultation, may also have an impact on non-professionals’ behaviour, as they may not feel comfortable in “owning” those words and thus resort to other strategies, such as euphemisms (Cambridge, 1999: 217). Disowning responsibility for face threats in questions asked by primary participants by turning to the use third-person pronouns or paraphrasing, or introducing one’s own politeness markers, are indicative of the non-professional interpreter’s assumption of their role as “an independent, active party in the interaction, who, too, has a face to lose” (Knapp-Potthoff and Knapp, 1987: 199).

Role boundaries are much more blurred in cases where one participant is at the same time primary interlocutor and interpreter. When TV hosts interpret in their own interviews, addition and filtering of information can arouse feelings of insecurity and mistrust among some guests (Jääskeläinen, 2003). More seriously, in cases involving police officers questioning and interpreting for a suspect, such a dual role becomes a potential instrument for manipulating the suspect into producing a confession (Berk-Seligson, 2009) – a clear example of the type of conflicts of interest that non-professional interpreters may have to face (cf. other examples in legal contexts in Schweda-Nicholson, 1989).

The potential for manipulation is not unheard of in other settings as well. Guidère (cited in Tipton, 2011: 25) provides examples of locally recruited untrained interpreters in conflict zones who are known to have manipulated exchanges for the common benefit of the local population. In other cases, manipulation might even respond to individual personal agendas, e.g. in cases of abusers interpreting for their victims in medical interviews (Phelan and Parkman, 1995: 555), although no empirical evidence is available to support this claim.

Besides the obvious dangers in such manipulations, discourse alterations caused by non-professional interpreters have been shown to trigger dysfunctional interactions in many senses. This is especially problematic in cases where the communication breakdown is not obvious to the parties (Pöchhacker and Kadric, 1999: 177), since they are left with the impression that functional communication actually took place. Changes in the form and content of original utterances and in the interlocutors’ participation status may lead not only to immediate consequences in the communicative event, but also to negative outcomes in the wider context of the interaction and related future events. Potentially dangerous consequences are prominent in legal and medical settings. Legal case reviews show examples of obstacles to the right to a fair trial or wrongful convictions or acquittals (Schweda-Nicholson, 1989; Berk-Seligson, 2009). Empirical research in the medical field points to clinically significant errors, e.g. misinterpretation of patients’ symptoms by the doctor (Elderkin-Thompson et al., 2001) or opacity in segments of patient history or unclear treatment directions (Flores et al., 2003).

Non-professional interpreters can also suffer the consequences of their actual participation in these events, regardless of their translational ability. The pressuring demands of the monolingual speaker (Schouten et al., 2012: 330) may cause stress among relatives/friends, just like the potential disruption of their routines to accommodate for the appointments where they are needed (Rhodes and Nocon, 2003: 48). Similarly, staff members who incidentally interpret in their workplace may feel uneasy for having to relinquish their contractual duties or pressured into interpreting out of fear of losing their jobs (Schweda-Nicholson, 1989: 713). Discomfort and even embarrassment are also frequently voiced concerns among family interpreters and their monolingual relatives if certain taboo topics are discussed in medical interviews (Schouten et al., 2012: 320), which can lead the patient to try to avoid the issue altogether (Rhodes and Nocon, 2003: 94). Such consequences are also relevant in the case of child language brokers, where
family dynamics can also be distorted: by acting as the family spokesperson, the child is subject to a process of “parentification,” disrupting conventional hierarchical structures within families (Cohen et al., 1999). This responsibility, together with the cognitive and emotional burden that some interactions may expose them to, might put children at psychological risk. Nevertheless, the ubiquity of the negative impact of language brokering on children has often been challenged. On the one hand, their emotional experiences are variable, ranging from frustration to pride, which probably relates to the extent to which their linguistic, cognitive and emotional capabilities can cope with the situation, as well as to the overall quality of family relations (Weisskirch, 2007). On the other hand, exposure to cross-cultural adult-like experiences may enhance both their world knowledge and cultural awareness (McQuillan and Tse, 1995: 205) and their academic performance and cognitive development (cf. Morales and Hanson, 2005: 491–4). Besides, these activities are not necessarily detrimental to family dynamics: parents and children may understand their functioning as a “performance team,” where decisions are jointly made while the former retain parental roles (Valdés, 2003: 97–8).

In a similar light, emerging — albeit scant — research findings point to the potential benefits of adult non-professional interpreting as well. Their positive contributions are often related to their personal background. On the one hand, bilingual staff are familiar with the local community and the intricacies of the institution and its staff (Rhodes and Nocon, 2003: 47), and, in some cases, also have expert subject-matter knowledge. Nurses, for instance, are well aware of the necessary steps in medical inquiry, are able to recognize the significance of important information mentioned casually by patients and are likely to help elicit key information for clinical decision-making (Elderkin-Thompson et al., 2001: 1345). On the other hand, relatives can be invaluable healthcare partners as they have privileged access to patient health information and family dynamics (Rosenberg et al., 2007: 250). Background-related contributions may indeed surpass the actual exchange: for instance, the “cultural capital” of locally-recruited interpreters in conflict zones can be key when navigating certain areas where “inflammatory situations” may arise (Tipton, 2011: 21–22) (see Chapter 19 on interpreting in conflict zones).

Finally, the benefits and drawbacks of using non-professional interpreters — either consistent with the above or additional to it — emerge in studies which draw from users’ and interpreters’ experiences to address the issue of the quality of their performance. User satisfaction studies tend to report that (health care) service providers almost invariably find their needs better met by professional interpreters, even though some studies show a reasonable degree of satisfaction with the use of relatives (Hornberger et al., 1997; Kuo and Fagan, 1999). However, doctors seem to appreciate the broader caregiver role assumed from relatives, which turns them into an invaluable resource for further care, monitoring, adherence to treatment and contact with medical services, although they express misgivings related mainly to the accuracy of information, potentially tainted as family interpreters’ feelings come into play in the medical consultation (Rosenberg et al., 2007). Misgivings related to the “ideological inappropriateness” of contents discussed in medical interviews are overwhelming when family interpreters are underage (Cohen et al., 1999).

Foreign language-speaking public service users report, however, a much more heterogeneous set of experiences. Post-encounter survey-based quantitative studies often show higher satisfaction rates for professional interpreters, although results are contradictory when professional interpreting services are provided by phone (compare Lee et al., 2002 with Kuo and Fagan, 1999). However, when these allophone users are requested to elaborate on their experiences with interpreters more globally, the scales begin to tip in favour of non-professionals.

In these users’ narratives, trust emerges as a decisive factor. Satisfaction with family members or friends is thus grounded on personal bonds and reliance. They are trusted to act in one’s best
interests, given shared histories, depth of knowledge of each other, emotional commitment and loyalty. Professional interpreters are trusted generally on the basis of impersonal characteristics (expert knowledge, impartiality and confidentiality), which only sometimes earn them preference above non-professionals drawn from informal networks (Alexander et al., 2004: 45ff.). In a similar light, the interpreter’s personal character and attitude also contribute to forging preferences among public service users, commonly in favour of their loved ones – empathy and helpfulness (bordering on advocacy) being extremely valued (Kuo and Fagan, 1999; Alexander et al., 2004). Finally, two different elements of the interpreter’s background come up in accounts of interpreting experiences: nature of the relationship with the person requiring interpreting, and sociodemographic characteristics such as age and gender. The nature of the relationship has proven central to the perception of confidentiality. In fact, people tend to rely on either their relatives or unknown professional interpreters for privacy on delicate matters, whereas insecurities arise over potential information leaks, especially in small, close communities, when mediators are friends or acquaintances – regardless of their translational competence or professional status (Rhodes and Nocon, 2003). Encounters with gender-discordant (professional or otherwise) or child interpreters are also a source for anxiety when intimate issues are on the table (ibid.).

Non-professional interpreters’ accounts of their experiences – whether adults or children – tend to confirm many of the aspects described in users’ narratives (Green et al., 2005; Schouten et al., 2012). They are aware of the challenges posed by terminology, which users note as one of their weaknesses, but also of their advantage in having first-hand information about the party that brought them into the encounter. Furthermore, they report being impacted by background, psychological and behavioural factors. For instance, they admit their encounters to be subject to age/gender constraints when discussing delicate topics, which often elicit feelings of uneasiness and discomfort in all parties. Besides, facing a role which they conceptualise as “just translating” but is shaped by their own social background, they find themselves contradicting their own perceptions with their acts, by assuming primary interlocutor roles, such as helper or carer, usually of the minority-language speaker (Schouten et al., 2012: 325–8). On the contrary, children seem very little conflicted about their role: they are deliberately partial in their attempts to make family interests prevail, understanding their practice as fully embedded in human relationships and aware of the potential effect of many mediated exchanges on their lives (Valdés, 2003: 97–8).

Despite the still low number of studies devoted to non-professional interpreting, the diversity of methodologies and approaches applied thus far has allowed researchers to paint a general picture of the state of the art of the “non-profession,” mainly circumscribed, however, to the issue of quality and the domain of health care. But besides this obvious contribution, some of these findings are already inspiring and informing exciting and original new avenues of research.

Future directions

Non-professional interpreting dates from before recorded history. Current predictions do not foresee it disappearing any time soon. The difficulties of responding to interpreting needs in a myriad of daily situations – for countless language combinations and in countless settings, geographically disperse, varied in nature and continuously changing – do not seem to be the only factor holding back professionalization in areas such as community interpreting. Despite the tentative advances in legislation and budget allocation of recent years, the current economic climate and austerity-led policies may bring this process to a halt, if not to regression (e.g. court interpreting service outsourcing scandal in the UK in 2012; Guardian, 2012). (See Chapter 3 on external players.)
In any case, non-professional interpreting is not found only in unregulated sectors, neither should it be understood anymore as the cheap band-aid alternative to professional quality services. Indeed, it is also flourishing in largely professionalized settings, such as conference interpreting. In a mentality shift away from the artificial neutrality of a cross-cultural agent, interpreters of all levels of expertise have recently begun to be involved in activist communities, thus providing their services on a volunteer basis for the benefit of like-minded individuals (Boëri and Maier, 2010).

Despite the visibility being acquired in different domains of actual interpreting practice, non-professional interpreting has not developed – yet – into a fully-fledged subarea of research. The studies described above bear witness to the emergence of scholarly interest in the field. However, against the backdrop of professionalization, research has been focused on deconstructing the myth of the natural interpreter. Its positioning as an empirical subfield – unarguably a positive contribution to interpreting studies as a whole – calls for a move beyond aprioristic views of interpreting and interpreters and beyond our current geopolitical and socio-professional scope (Boéri, 2012: 129).

Moving beyond quality as an overriding topic of research may be one way to go. A more tolerant approach to non-professional interpreters’ adoption of primary participant roles opens the door to richer analyses of the co-construction of dialogue among all parties and their joint attempts to achieve interactional goals effectively. These analyses also include participatory constellations which echo the reality of 21st-century interpreter-mediated encounters but contradict long-established conceptualizations of them (e.g. the fact that “monolingual” interpreting users may have some knowledge of the other language involved influences communicative dynamics and the forms of interpreter participation) (Meyer, 2012). As an illustration of this upcoming trend, Traverso (2012) uses business meetings to illustrate cases of collaborative interpretation, where both meaning and form and the responsibility for interpreting are negotiated among several members to the interaction.

Striving for understanding the rationale behind these shifts implies overcoming normative approaches about role. Some studies have stressed the relevance of deliberate, semi-deliberate or subconscious conformity to audience needs and expectations for communication success in interpreter-mediated encounters. Whereas these expectations need not always be contrary to more traditional ones, they sometimes are. For example, although informational accuracy, communicative style or adaptation to preferred lexical choices cause non-professionals in Gambian religious services to be considered “gifted” interpreters (Karlik, 2010), interpreting success in the ceremony opening a new bank in Burkina Faso involves a considerable deviation from standard norms (e.g. adding anecdotes to relate to listeners’ experience, omitting face-threatening remarks, etc.) (Kouraogo, 2001).

Light could also be shed on this matter not only by studying accounts of non-professional interpreters’ experiences, but also by situating them in their socio-political and cultural contexts. By doing so, Schouten et al. (2012) succeed in providing tentative explanations for different behaviours by non-professional interpreters in medical settings in the Netherlands and Turkey. Furthermore, this contextualization facilitates understanding of the practice of active civic involvement by these traditionally neutral intermediaries, be it in the shape of volunteer interpreter groups acting as “agents of change” (Boëri and Maier, 2010), or child language brokers contributing to their communities while shaping their own engaged selves (Bauer, 2010). In these cases, longitudinal studies could also shed light on the flexibility and adaptability of non-professional interpreters to the constantly evolving circumstances of their immediate contexts.

Such “revolutionary” empirical input about the status of the interpreter role, including but not limited to the previous studies, may be contributing to a conceptual shift similar to Wadensjö’s introduction of the coordinating task, which shattered previous views of the
interpreter’s role, but shortly thereafter became an undisputed pillar in our conception of interpreters in dialogic encounters.

Some of these examples also evidence the commitment of new research to explore beyond the geopolitical and socio-professional boundaries of the field, in both institutionalized sectors and in those in the process of institutionalization. The fact that medical interpreting in the Western world, especially in the United States, has attracted most of the attention in the area of non-professional interpreting does not minimize the impact of the above-mentioned studies focusing on Africa, Turkey, business meetings and religious services (also Hokkanen, 2012) nor that of research exploring emergency humanitarian assistance (Bulut and Kurultay, 2001), conflict situations (Palmer, 2007; Baker, 2010; Tipton, 2011), mass media (Chiaro, 2002), correctional institutions (Martínez-Gómez Gómez, 2011), child language brokering in Europe (cf. special issue of mediAzioni 10), and the reality of “ghostwriters” and CODAs enabling communication between hearing and Deaf communities (Adam et al., 2011; Napier, forthcoming).

The study of non-professional interpreters allows us to open up not only geopolitical and socio-professional boundaries but also methodological and epistemological ones. On the one hand, an open dialogue among all disciplines researching in this area would contribute to mutual enhancement of methodological repositories, including ethnographical, ecological multi-method approaches applied in child language brokering, which are much in line with a current willingness to comprehend (non-professional) interpreting as a socio-culturally embedded interaction. On the other hand, the study of the spontaneous behaviour of these interpreters in actual practice may contribute to a more comprehensive picture of the basic processes, from cognitive to interactional, involved in different modes of interpreting, given that such spontaneous behaviour has not been subject to the normative assumptions acquired through training.

This is not meant to suggest in any case that training is unjustified. The practical experiences on which bilinguals base their learning do not always account for the broad range of market demands (Muñoz Martín, 2011: 52). However, if the academic community is able to pin down the cognitive processes involved in the natural development of translational abilities, the effectiveness of current interpreter training programmes could be boosted by imitating them and focusing on more realistic task- and process-oriented approaches which would expose students to a wide variety of (pseudo-)authentic experiences and thus increase awareness of the many aspects of the interpreting process (Muñoz Martín, 2011: 51–2), including interpersonal elements, and strategies to foster them. Besides, further understanding of non-professional interpreting has implications for training outside traditional frameworks. In order to capitalize on the skills of non-professionals, some scholars are arguing for providing them with tailor-made training (Angelelli, 2011). In such courses, non-professionals would be able to enhance their interpreting abilities and reflect actively and globally on the task of interpreting, with a potential specific focus on the setting(s) where they tend to be more active. Ideally, this training would also involve the users of their services, under the same assumptions which support training for the users of professional services, and given the proven importance of the co-construction of successful interlinguistic communication (Elderkin-Thompson et al., 2001: 1354). Such initiatives would encourage and formalize spontaneous and often subconscious horizontal learning practices already existing between the two groups (Tipton, 2011). (See Chapter 25 on pedagogy.)

Nevertheless, the fact that non-professional interpreting still is not an independent subarea of research translates into insufficient theoretical and conceptual foundations. The definition of key notions and their corresponding terminology is still underdeveloped, with fuzzy boundaries between fundamental concepts. The empirical front is obviously leading and, although it has already offered very interesting findings, it may be suffering from isolation of studies in scattered settings and geographical locations, with only a few attempts to work towards building a core of
practical knowledge. Fostering intra-disciplinary collaboration, as well as inter-disciplinary learning – and thus benefiting from the experience of other fields in child language brokering – seems essential for our development.

The fact that research has been – and still is – a key element in professionalization processes in certain branches of interpreting may divide the academic community involved in non-professional interpreting. Confronted with such a controversial issue, some researchers may fear that foregrounding these unregulated practices might result in professionalization being held back. Others may believe that legitimizing non-professionals’ space in interpreting contexts is not incompatible with the professional growth of the field. In any case, the whole research process, from the formulation of hypotheses to the interpretation of data, may eventually be tainted by our position in this controversy. If and how to avoid this, however, remain unanswered questions.

Non-professional interpreting is no longer uncharted territory, but rather an independent subarea of research still in the early stages of development. Despite its adversarial relationship with professionalization, existing research bears witness to the potential that exploring it as an issue in its own right has for interpreting studies as a whole, under the assumption that turning the blind eye on realities that we – as scholars, practitioners, trainers or trainees – might disagree with, limits our current view of the field and may ultimately slow down scientific progress.

Further reading

This inter-disciplinary collection of papers confronts the negative discourse on child language brokering (CLB) by underscoring the beneficial short- and long-term impact of such activities on brokers, families and society at large.

New approaches to exploring the field construe non-professionals as an asset to the many settings presented (approx. 60% translation) and challenge traditional assumptions common in the discipline.

A descriptive analysis of the performance of a non-professional interpreter evidences the detrimental impact of her role shifts on conversational dynamics and the professional quality of a therapy session.

A wide array of topics related in some way to natural translation feed the weekly entries of this popular-science-oriented blog: conceptual reflections, historical accounts, literature reviews, news …

This book reports on the talents of young interpreters from a socio-cultural and translational perspective, through interviews with parents and children and the examination of simulated interpreting tasks.
References


Non-professional interpreters


27

INTERPRETING AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Mette Rudvin

Introduction

‘Professional identity’ has been studied widely in a number of disciplines (see e.g. Beijaard et al. 2004). In Interpreting Studies (IS) and its sister discipline Translation Studies (TS), there has been an escalation of interest in this area in the last decade, as the interpreting profession and the translation profession have continued to evolve in response to internal and external factors, gain acceptance as fully-fledged professions and utilize to their advantage developments in information- and media technology.

This chapter looks at the various definitions of professional identity in a few related disciplines and examines whether and how interpreting as a profession meets these criteria. The author shares the view of many contemporary scholars that professional identity is an aggregate set of beliefs, values, motives and experiences relating to work, shared by a definable group and leading to a professional role (Schein 1978), but that it is at the same time negotiated dynamically, bringing together multiple identities at the public and private, social and personal levels. Thus, one might say that professional identity is a complex entity constituted by a number of complex socio-cultural interactions that influence each other but that may at times lead to conflicting beliefs and values. It is also a product of how people compare and differentiate themselves from other professional groups. Interpreting, like all professions, is thus a complex interweaving of numerous factors from different domains of the human experience. A necessity that all professions share is that of seeking recognition, as a group, from the wider community; it is the achievement of that recognition that empowers its members to ‘act professionally’ based on their special expertise. Indeed, some scholars have defined ‘profession’ as ‘institutionalised expertise’ (Baxter 2011:24).

Interpreting practitioners – and to a lesser extent trainers and scholars – are required by the very nature of the profession to interact with numerous other institutions and public and private bodies, and this close interface may sometimes lead to a conflict of professional values or to a ‘power conflict’ (‘who sets the standards?’, ‘who has the final say if and when a dilemma arises?’, i.e., ‘consenting to dominant views’) (see Chapter 3 on key external players). A professional identity implies a role of responsibility and decision-making that is precisely the result of collaboration and interaction with other stakeholders, although it may in turn lead to cross-disciplinary ethical conflicts.
This chapter addresses the various parameters that affect individual and collective self-perception as a profession(al). It is suggested that whereas the professional role, and identity, of the conference interpreter is reasonably straightforward, the identity of interpreters working in the medical, legal and other more generally ‘community’ related settings, is far more complex and has been an obstacle to the creation of a cohesive and well-defined professional (sub)community (see also Setton and Liangliang 2009).

Furthermore, professions and professional identity, like all social practices and systems, are situated in their wider social, political and cultural contexts and are constituted by many, sometimes conflicting, variables. Consequently, professional identity varies across cultures and countries, governed by changing state policies; this is less apparent for conference interpreting, which is affected more by internal market variables such as the use of lingua francas (currently English in the ‘typical’ conference settings) that reduce the need for interpretation and the promotion of multilingual policies in international organizations. The impact of local and federal policy (especially immigration policies) is much more immediate for the sub-disciplines of community and legal interpreting (see Chapters 12 and 14 on court and community interpreting). Differences in macro-structural features affect the community’s and the stakeholders’ view of the interpreting profession (collective professional identity) and subsequently interpreters’ self-perception and, ultimately, performance. This chapter questions whether the interpreting profession should be seen as a fragmented group of bodies, each acting according to its own national parameters (set by stakeholders and national policies and politics), or rather as a pan-national body that transcends such differences and acts as an autonomous, independent professional community with an autonomous set of standards, practices and objectives – if that is indeed possible. International conference interpreting associations such as the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) are indeed in a position to fulfil this pan-national function, but again this is less feasible with the arguably more fragmented and nationally variegated sub-disciplines of community and legal interpreting (see e.g. Prunč 2010 for a discussion on the difference in professional status between various prestigious and non-prestige sub-sectors of interpreting, namely conference interpreting and community interpreting).

What constitutes a profession?

The following list, adapted primarily from two studies in, respectively, public services and legal translation (Baxter 2011:24ff and Monzó 2009:136ff), suggests some of the main categories that could be used to identify the defining characteristics of a profession.

In relation to society and to world knowledge:

- **Distinction, exclusivity**: professionals have special skills that other do not;
- **Problem-solving capacity**: these organized skills (expertise) allow them to solve problems that society deems to be sufficiently important and recurrent to warrant the investment of time and money and authorization;
- **Group identity**: a profession is a ‘community of practice’, a structured organization supported by a professional body which may or may not have mandatory registration;
- **Group/community identity distinct from other groups**: professionals will have a sense of belonging to a profession and as such have a professional identity that differentiates them from other professions;
- **Jurisdiction**: professions dominate a particular area of activity precisely because only they have the ability and/or authority to solve that problem;
• Positive impact on society: positive values are attached to the problem-solving capacity, to the professionals and to the profession.

Internal characteristics and development

• Motivation and reward: the potential reward of exclusive jurisdiction of a professional domain and of attributed status must be sufficient to warrant investment; for the individual members, rewards are membership status and subsequent privileges (also financial).
• Training: professions possess knowledge that is systematized, formalized, conveyed, applied, updated.
• Guidelines and rules: a profession has an established code of ethics, articulated to varying degrees of sophistication, standardization and authority.
• Accreditation and legitimization: a profession has a recognized scheme of baseline accreditation.
• Credentials: credentials constitute ‘cultural capital’ by creating a barrier to group-entrance; they link “institutional knowledge, professional practices and social perception” Monzó (2009:141); in a sense, credentials actually create the profession as an authoritative entity.
• Standards: a profession operates to certain professional standards codified through tradition and experience, training, codes of ethics or standards of practice.

The degree to which these parameters are met by the interpreting profession, or sub-disciplines, will be addressed below.

Historical perspectives

The existing literature on professional identity

Although much has been written on ‘professionalism’ in the literature on interpreting, it has been largely connected to the inherent characteristics of what it means to be ‘a professional’, to ‘professionalism’ as an attribute of ‘the good professional’ (largely from a prescriptive viewpoint) and on the intrinsic relationship between professionalism and quality, as ‘good professional output’. This connection is essential, if not axiomatic, in all disciplines. ‘Production quality’, in this framework, is the final output of a set of features that define a profession and a professional: a set of skills that are useful to society and through which society is able to solve a series of problems. Indeed, these skills and the knowledge that underpins them are restricted to a given and limited group (a ‘profession’) and acquired through (tertiary-level) training and/or experience. Furthermore, being a member of ‘a profession’ in this framework implies a degree of accountability to the wider society by virtue of his/her ‘problem solving’ nature, limited to a given community of practice and over which the members have (to a lesser or greater extent) monopoly.

Recent interpreting literature also contains a wealth of interesting in-depth studies on the role and self-perception of the interpreter, through surveys, case studies or theoretical contributions (in particular Angelelli 2004a, 2004b; Roy 2000; Wadensjö 1998; Pöchhacker 1999, 2004; Diriker 2004; Setton and Lianlang 2009; Dam and Zethsen 2013; Takeda 2010). Such studies focus on the translation-interpretation process, on the role of the interpreter as a participant in a discourse setting, as a participant in an institutional setting constrained by institutional parameters, as a player in an ideological or political context, as an ‘active participant’ enjoying agency and decision-making power, self-preservation, etc. These studies are analysed through various models – hermeneutical or cross-cultural – and theoretical frameworks.
In these studies, the notion ‘role’ and ‘professional identity’ overlap to some extent. Although ‘professional identity’ at the collective level has as yet received less attention than issues such as ‘role’, an increasing number of studies are attesting to the anchoring of interpreting as a profession and discipline in its own right (Mikkelsen’s early studies (1996a, 1996b), followed by Shlesinger (2009) and Pöchhacker (1999, 2004) on the development of the profession).

Other studies address the organization of interpreting services and how these services and the people who perform these services are perceived by the wider public (Ozolins 1998; Garrett 2009; Setton and Liangliang 2009; Monzó 2009). Grbic’s (2010) study on ‘boundary work’ addresses the issue of classification and professions. In a similar vein, Bahadir (2010) discusses the ‘situatedness’ of professions and tackles issues of power.

It might be interesting at this point to explore sources from other disciplinary areas that shed light on what identity means to human beings, what professional identity entails, why it is important, and how these identities are played out in a mutually construing recursive relationship with the surrounding environment.

Building identities: people and organizations

‘Identity’ and how identity is formed in the individual and in society has been addressed widely in various literatures, principally in sociology, in the closely related discipline of anthropology, and in psychology. Roughly speaking, we might say that while psychology examines issues of identity at the individual level, the domains of sociology and anthropology address identity at the collective level (although both address the interface between these dimensions). The sociological literature, and in particular the ‘sociology of professions’, tends to explore professions as an occupational group, more than as individuals (see Larson 1977 and Abbott 1998 for some of the ‘classic’ studies on professions) and at the collective rather than the individual level (Hotto 2008:724). Much of the literature on professions has explored the ‘prototypical’ settings such as medicine and law, and some of the literature referred to in this chapter stems from the health sector and sociology – in some cases studies by medical scholars themselves (see Pratt et al. 2006:236 drawing on Hughes 1956). Other disciplines and professions that have addressed this issue in recent years are teaching and business management. More recently the issue of identity has emerged as an area of investigation in Cultural Studies (e.g. Hall 1997), and has increasingly been seen as the construction and expression of a person’s sense of self at an individual and a collective level; in line with a general paradigm shift in the humanities, identity tends now to be regarded as a constructed artefact, fluid and in a recursive relationship with its environment, rather than a ‘predetermined’ and essentially stable ‘given’, an approach adopted by many earlier studies. At an individual level, professional identity relates to the construction of the self’s own objectives and abilities as a result of the person’s life history and rapport with all levels of domains in society (family, peers, school, training institutions, workplace, community of practice) in the wider community. At this individual level, professional identity tends to be a fluid and to a large extent unpredictable process. At a collective level, ‘profession’ relates to broader trends in society – ideology and policies in local, national and international politics – especially those relating to transnational movement such as migration policies, trade agreements, border disputes, language policy, etc., inter-profession competition, lobbying and funding. At the collective level professional identity responds more slowly to change and is thus more stable, or perceived as more stable.

As a relatively new profession (see Chapter 1 on the history of interpreting) and as a result of technological innovation (see Chapter 22 on remote interpreting), interpreting has entered a dynamic process of intense change, restructuring and aggregation. Although still marked by a
strong fragmentation into sub-disciplines that enjoy unequal status, it is well on its way to being established, consolidated, and distinguishing itself with a specific and a clearly defined professional mandate. At this particular historical period as we begin the third millennium, the significance of professional identity with respect to the broader community, it could be argued, lies in questioning its autonomy from the institutions it collaborates with and is to some degree dependent upon (international organizations, health services, legal services, social services, educational services, etc.).

Defining key terms

Identity: continuity and ‘sameness’ in the individual’s self-perception

What exactly is identity, and why is it necessary to – or constitutive of – the human experience? The literature on identity, from psychology to sociology to cultural studies and much more, is vast, but the most represented and recurrent aspects relate to a person’s self-image and sense of purpose. Thus, it provides internal and group-based coherence, meaning and continuity, giving shape to thought and individual and collective action, ‘how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future’ (Deters 2000:21, quoting Norton).

Professions and professionals: a monopoly of knowledge, skills and competence

There are many forms of group identity (the principal ones being cultural, ethnic, national, clan/tribe, linguistic, and religious) of which ‘professional identity’ is but one. Relating to the world of work and the interface of society/work, sociology is the discipline that has traditionally given most attention to this area, but other literatures – not least health and education – have more recently invested significant research in the investigation of professional identity as it has evolved in these domains. One of the key criteria employed in the definitions of professional identity, especially in the sociological literature, is that relating to exclusivity mentioned in the first part of this chapter, namely the knowledge and skills possessed by a certain group of people that enable them to exercise certain practices that are necessary to society. In other words, ‘an organized group possesses esoteric knowledge that has economic value when applied to problems (e.g. sickness) faced by people in a society’ (Pratt et al. 2006:235, drawing on Carr-Sanders and Wilson 1933 and MacDonald 1995). The members of this group, being in a position to exercise their skills and apply their acquired knowledge usefully, enter the group (profession) having acquired those prerequisite skills through training and/or experience, or in some cases (more controversially) through ‘natural skills’ (see Chapter 26 on non-professional interpreters). This confers upon the members of this group both privileges and responsibilities and the recognition of these features by society: ‘Because of their unique knowledge and skill set, society grants professionals higher levels of prestige and autonomy than it grants non-professionals’ (Pratt et al. 2006:235, drawing on Larsen 1977). This is arguably the most essential aspect defining and constituting ‘profession’.

Membership in a professional group thus encompasses a range of recognized competencies and a subsequent self-perception and perception by society. Members position themselves reflexively and interactively within this emerging field, and these ‘dimensions of competence become dimensions of identity’ (Wenger 1998:152). The acquisition and exercising of these skills and competencies require learning new and different knowledge units (such as becoming a consultant and learning a medical specialization, or interpreting in specialized sectors, or being a...
polyvalent ‘type’ of interpreter – community, court, conference – at the same time) that need to be melded together in a unified form. We might say then that membership entails ‘multi-memberships’; a person belongs to different identity-forming groups (communities of practice) simultaneously.

**Barriers to the formation of professional identity in interpreting**

It is on the grounds of these basic features that a profession can act as a unified body or structure and through which it can promote its own interests (insofar as the conditions in society permit this) and improve the conditions of its members and the people it serves. Based on the criteria mentioned in the Introduction (based largely on the studies of Baxter and Monzó), I have identified here a few key areas that I believe could be major obstacles to the complete consolidation of interpreting – in all its sub-disciplines – to reach full professional status.

**In relation to society**

*Trust and exclusivity:* It is essential that society trusts the capacity of an occupational group to the extent that they can exclude others and achieve exclusivity. This is less of a problem for simultaneous conference interpreting because of the stringent training requirements and due to the boundary-forming technical nature of the booth. It is more problematic for other sub-areas in which it is much harder to assert, and especially maintain, exclusivity (i.e. dialogic forms of interpreting are easier to encroach upon as they have no ‘natural barrier’ to form a boundary between specialists and ‘natural interpreters’ due to the commonly held lay perception that a general command of the relevant languages is sufficient to provide an adequate interpreted rendition, or the ‘anyone can do it’ approach; Dam 2013). Furthermore, exclusivity is jeopardized by the lack of ability to test and control performance in dialogic interpreting. Conference interpreting is more controllable and therefore accountable due to the ease with which each performance can be recorded and listened to at a later stage. Accountability is thus easier to gain for conference interpreters and other interpreting forms where the rendition is public and/or easily retrievable.

*Jurisdiction:* For sub-disciplines such as community interpreting, stakeholders have (sometimes complete) control over the communication process and can establish mandate at will; it is up to the community of practice (insofar as it exists in the various domains and countries) and up to individuals to negotiate that mandate and assert exclusivity based on their possession of restricted knowledge (interpreting techniques, strategies, terms, transfer competence, etc.); if ‘natural skills’ are sufficient (an erroneous but widely diffused lay perception), it is harder to claim the need for specialized skills and credentials and to establish trust (especially when the issue of pay emerges and non-professionals undercut the prices). Furthermore, given that interpreting is intrinsically linked to – and in the case of community interpreting up to a point dependent on – other professions (their ‘clients’), achieving full autonomy, decision-making power and thus authority, is more problematic. Again, conference interpreting is at an advantage compared to interpreting for public services or other forms of interpreting because it is less ‘at the mercy’ and under the jurisdiction and mandate of the institutions it serves, and secondly because it is often backed by the powerful international associations that provide: services (training, accreditation, recruitment opportunities, peer networking, funding, marketing, etc.); prestige; financial and political leverage vis-à-vis state and other funding and policy-making bodies; and a body to negotiate pay scales.

*Motivation:* Are the capital resources accrued by the individual and the group adequate to invest energy in the creation and maintenance of a profession(Al)? If ‘the profits which accrue
from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible’ (Monzó 2009:142 quoting Bourdieu), this will only be possible if those profits exist, are forthcoming reasonably quickly and perceived as such by the members-to-be. In conference interpreting the profits are high enough to warrant the investment of training and recruitment, but that is not always so in the often under-paid dialogic interpreting practices such as community interpreting – and in many countries legal interpreting – where profits are often insufficient to warrant investment or the formation of a professional community.

Variables and dynamics internal to the profession

Training for interpreters in a systematized form is lacking in many countries and for many sub-genres; the percentage of untrained interpreters working in the profession and indeed constituting the profession is arguably high, although impossible to quantify. The lack of training obviously leads to a lack of an accreditation system and to subsequent credentials, thus hindering the formation of a profession with respect to exclusive entry and limitation of non-members (untrained, unaccredited) and leaving full access to those who can convincingly argue that they possess the corresponding ‘natural skills’. This is not a situation that promotes the creation of a profession as it is understood according to the above criteria. The plethora of publications, conferences, courses and general financial investment in certification of interpreting attests to this being of essential importance to trainers, scholars, associations and institutions – and that it is a hallmark of ‘profession-hood’.

Reward: without the potential reward of exclusive jurisdiction of a professional domain, the risk factor of investment – for a professional community – is high. At the individual level, the issue of pay is important in establishing the degree of achieved professional identity, or in-group membership: accepting to work for low pay is discredited by other members of the profession as it is harmful both to themselves as individuals (unfair competition) as well as to their perceived group status. In other words, accepting to work for sub-standard rates should exclude you from full-status membership in that professional group; i.e. ‘a person who works for sub-standard rates cannot possibly have the competence required to be a true professional’ and ‘a good professional will charge high rates’. In a study of translation blogs, Dam (2013) shows how pay rates were a strong professional identity formation criterion for translators: ‘In these examples, the link between skills and income comes across clearly, as does the assumed segmentation, or even polarization, of the translation market.’ In a sense, adequate pay thus constitutes tangible ‘proof’ of professional identity.

Positive impact on society: Positive values are attached to problem-solving (overcoming language barriers), to professionals and to the profession. In conference interpreting, positive values are attributed to overcoming this barrier because it is a high-prestige, high-investment and money-generating domain, while in community interpreting it is in many countries a low-prestige occupation (involving low-prestige actors) and not perceived as income-generating or necessarily as wise budgeting. In conference interpreting, prestige is also attributed to the ‘high-effort’ training period and the perceived ‘high-effort’ cognitive process; this is not so in many other forms of interpreting.

On the basis of these parameters, it could be argued that it has been easier for conference interpreting to establish itself as a discipline and to gain exclusivity and jurisdiction over the practice than it has for other domains and sub-disciplines of interpreting that do not require technical expertise and where the danger of using ‘natural interpreters’ is much more likely, making it more difficult not just to claim but to maintain exclusivity in and jurisdiction over the practice of interpreting.
‘Customization’: identity repair and reconciliation

In a study of the medical profession, Pratt et al. (2006) show how certain, quite predictable, factors impact to various degrees on the development of professional identity; at times these identities clash, and these clashes or ‘integrity violations’ are ‘fixed’ through various strategies, depending partly on the strength of the individual’s prior identity and on the strength of the ‘clash’ or ‘violation’. For example, when the ‘clash’ derives from a (perceived or real) difference between what one actually does at work (especially in terms of mundane tasks that fall to novice professionals and that are completely unrelated to one’s profession, but often part and parcel of being a ‘junior’) and one’s training and professional mandate, a ‘work-identity’ mismatch or misalignment occurs. This mismatch is also a result of practitioners’ own self-perceived standards of excellence that they have come to take for granted, their assumptions of what is possible and feasible, etc. (see Chapter 20 on ethics).

Again, we find a deep rift between conference and other forms of interpreting: while conference interpreters’ mandate and tasks are reasonably clear-cut and delineated – and status is accorded to them as a recognition of a long and high-investment training period – other forms of interpreting that have briefer training periods, less highly-specialized task definition (and less technology) are more vulnerable to exploitation to fulfil non-related mundane tasks. This is certainly true for community interpreting but also for business interpreting and interpreting at trade fairs (in Italy they are called ‘hostesses’, and the general multi-tasking communication and accompanying function is predominant), as well as for liaison, diplomatic, and media interpreting.

The term ‘customization process’ is then used by Pratt et al to describe the re-integration of disparate identities, gradually strengthening and enriching the person’s professional identity into a more complete whole. The resolution of these conflicts and clashes eventually leads to ‘identity enrichment’. ‘Integrity’ is that state of being, of the sense of one’s self, in which the various sub-identities in a continuous state of flux are aligned.

Another source of identity violation, and one that is more difficult to resolve or ‘customize’ is that of professional ethical dilemmas such as allegiance formations and the breach of impartiality. In virtually all codes of ethics or standards of practice (see Hale 2008), impartiality is seen as a crucial prerequisite (similar to that in many professions such as doctors and judges, if not lawyers). The code of ethics, a basic component in most interpreter training programmes, has a strong identity formation function, and young interpreters (here I refer to trained interpreters) start their professional lives with a code of ethics firmly entrenched. Although some interpreter training programmes take account of the fact that real-life situations are anything but clear-cut (as do some of the more nuanced and realistic codes of ethics), many do not, and the meeting with real-life situations for interpreters working in areas such as health, social services, law, education, and refugee services may lead precisely to ‘integrity violations’ in that real-life needs and practice clash with imprinted training. This could also take the form of confidentiality and allegiance towards the institution rather than the client, patient, defendant, etc. If the institution is one where extreme situations unfold (refugee camps, shelters, jails, emergency wards, etc.) the tug-of-war between the claims of institution, training standards, client and human values may be very powerful. The result may be a sense of confusion and distress, and a weakened professional identity resulting either from the lack of a core set of values or a lack of flexibility and ability to manage diverse situations with diverse needs and expectations. Yet another crucial source of integrity violation could be found between cultural systems – i.e. when an interpreter is socialized into one system through training but works in either different country or a different subsystems (see Rudvin 2007); examples of issues that emerge here are: topic avoidance/taboo;
indirectness; truth-telling vs. avoidance/hedging; specific group dynamics regarding internal hierarchies, age, gender, etc.; not knowing to which group the interpreter owes allegiance; and connotated language (politically incorrect, ideological, vulgar, etc.).

Impartiality is an ‘external’ parameter that links the interpreting act to its context and is therefore affected by, if not dependent upon, context. However, parameters that are internal to the communicative act of interpreting and have been internalized through training and codes of ethics, such as the principle of accuracy, are easier to maintain and less prone to integrity violations if the interpreter has acquired the skills taught during the training period assuming that accuracy is possible in that specific utterance and language combination.

While the integrity violation posed by impartiality affects role perception, the challenge of accuracy will be felt more as an objective that can be acquired through adequate preparation, practice and information gathering. Ethical competence, under which impartiality falls, is acquired less easily and as a result of experience and maturity, i.e. the ability to evaluate the situation contextually, cognizant of all the risks involved.

Such ‘integrity violations’ can weaken professional identity and lead to confusion, guilt, a sense of not being a ‘good’ interpreter, of not being responsible, not helping one’s clients (not being impartial, not following one’s mandate), and balance or harmony is thus undermined. One determining stressor, in both Pratt’s data and Baxter’s literature review, is the question of discretion or autonomy, how much decision-making power the individual actually has (Pratt et al. 2006: 254; Baxter 2011). A lack of such discretion can lead to a strong sense of powerlessness, of loss of control over one’s ability to actualize the professional standards interpreters have internalized through the training process or in a code of ethics, and to weakened self-esteem and professional quality and performance. This is especially true for interpreting domains such as community, court and medical interpreting, because of their relationship with the institutions and also because of the intimate and often traumatic nature of the conversation. A strong sense of powerlessness, of loss of control, may thus emerge here.

The self-perception of various sub-specialties in the medical profession, discussed by Pratt et al. (2006), operates in a competitive fashion whereby some specialties (surgery) perceive themselves as distinctive in relation to other specialties, and this self-perception both reinforces and separates their professional identity. With the fragmentation of sub-specialties in interpreting, where court interpreting in some countries enjoys high prestige (and adequate pay) while in other countries it is perhaps one of the least protected and prestigious sectors in which interpreters work (in part because of the inadequate pay), this sub-identity violation has already occurred (see Dam and Zethsen 2009; Pruncˇ 2010). Sub-speciality prestige (high economic and social capital) will depend on a number of environmental factors (perception of the public, utility to the public, the ability to solve problems that are considered important, association with high status users or institutions) or internal working conditions (such as pay). We might thus speak of a powerful identity fragmentation or violation under the ‘umbrella’ of interpreting in competing sub-genres (such as court vs. medical interpreting).

While Pratt et al. focus on the amalgamation of sub-identities and the resolution of conflict and incompatibilities, Solomon speaks of primary and secondary identities that are experimented with and ‘tried on’. An individual selects from a ‘repertoire of identity types associated with a type of work’ which occurs at the intersection of individual history and social/cultural norms

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and the conventions of a given domain of work’ (Solomon 2007:7–9). This is a process that takes place in the course of the ‘life history’ of many interpreters, from training to steadily more professional experience: the ‘trying out’ of the various specialized areas of interpreting (and often translation alongside) and the different interpersonal and ethical demands of each. Wenger speaks of ‘reconciliation’ in the attempt to maintain one continuous identity across boundaries (Wenger 1998); the resolution of this imbalance has a powerful ‘sense-making function’. Again, with conference interpreting this is less of an ‘identity’ problem (although it is a significant cognitive challenge in terms of the range of terminology domains) than it is with dialogic forms of interpreting (medical, business, legal/court, social, humanitarian, media, emergency and conflict, war, etc.). Slay and Smith also discuss identity formation of stigmatized groups and report how individuals adapt and adjust their identities during periods of career transition (Slay and Smith 2011:87). At a macro-level, this reflects the stigmatization of precisely these sub-genres of interpreting, historically, compared to the more high-prestige conference interpreting. Whether or not this is what the future holds for the interpreting profession tout court is difficult to predict, but seems unlikely.

**Current issues**

*The integration process*

We have seen in Pratt et al.’s (2006) data and the framework they suggest that the development of professional identity follows a trajectory of training to specialization to fully responsible professional to continued professional experience, and each of these phases, or strands of professional identity, are constantly negotiated. The first phase is clearly that of completing the training period, of leaving a protected world of limited responsibility and entering a much less reassuring one in which budding professionals are responsible for their own actions and the welfare of people who depend on their services. In some of the prototypical professions such as medicine and law, the ‘boundary crossing’ from student to practitioner is more gradual and passes through a period of apprenticeship (internship, residency, specialization), which again is fragmented into various sub-specialties. In interpreting, this transition is far more abrupt and less cushioned by an adequate apprenticeship period where novices can try out their skills in a real-life situation supported by peers until they master the necessary skills and are able to deal maturely with potential ‘identity violations’.

In other words, interpreters ‘grow into’ their professional identity, which starts with theoretical and practical training (when this is the case) and continues with work experience; it is not ‘ready’ and ‘fixed in stone’ as soon as they complete the training period, but continues throughout their professional life. Thus, the individual actively constructs his or her own identity (Pratt et al. 2006:237). The function, and power, of the surrounding professional community through peer feedback and the powerful role of national and pan-national associations for conference interpreters (and court and medical interpreters in the US, for example), is a major conditioning factor in this identity-forming period, however, and the stronger the peer feedback and surrounding pressure (of training institutions and of professional associations) is, the more the individual will conform to the norms provided during the training period.

If the entire training phase is absent and interpreters lack both practical skills and a professional identity, *ad hoc* interpreters will likely find identity-resolution and integrity violation even more difficult to negotiate, and will most likely adhere to the identity conferred on them by each individual client. Those sub-professions which are backed by strong training institutions
and associations are much less vulnerable to the pressures and conditioning factors found in those forms of interpreting that are far more closely linked to, and arguably more dependent on, institutions.

**Identity and context, profession and state – a mutually interactive relationship**

As in virtually all of the studies following what we might refer to as the ‘post-structuralist turn’ in a range of academic disciplines (sociology, anthropology, philosophy language studies, cultural studies, psychology, but also economics and law), Deters (2012) acknowledges in her study the connection and recursive interaction between discourse, identity (individual and collective), agency (individual and collective) and contextual factors, as expressed through social, cultural, political, ideological, historical as well as cognitive and physiological variables. This ‘turn’ reflects a deeper understanding in the humanities, one that has informed academic literature for the last few decades, of the reciprocally impacting connection between language and the individual, between individual and society, between thought/cognition and context, between form, content and context, and between a text and its interpretation (in both senses of the word). Meaning is no longer seen as a ‘fixed’, unified, stable entity but is dynamically created through discourses and practices; meaning, through discourse and other semiotic practices, is constantly ‘in process’ (for one of the earliest studies in IS see Metzger 1999). This has been precisely the locus of the ‘cultural turn’ in interpreting and translation studies the last decade or so (somewhat longer in TS). It has deeply affected the meta-practice of interpreting in the form of research and the acknowledgment of the wide range of contextual impact factors on the interpreted rendition, as well as the recognition that interpreting is never a ‘neutral’ or ‘invisible’ act. As such, it has affected the meta-interpretation of the profession and its academic/intellectual identity and positioning in an array of other academic disciplines. Whether or not it has affected interpreting performance is hard to say: In other words, has the cultural turn provided the individual interpreter with the authority to be more ‘involved’ in the communicative act and in his/her rendition? Again, this seems more likely to happen in the realm of dialogic forms of interpreting rather than in conference interpreting. It will be interesting to see whether or not descriptive research on the interpreter’s self-perception and role, such as Angelelli’s (2004b) work, receptive of the interpreter’s impact on the communicative act, will in time feed back into interpreting practice and ‘authorize’, and thus consolidate, that potential leeway further (this relates specifically to community-based forms of interpreting). It is hard to say whether the meta-forms of the profession (academic literature) have the strength and power to change its very practice and thus self-perception, professional identity, or other factors such as accommodation to the requirements of client institutions (see Shlesinger 2009 for a discussion on the interface between theory and practice).

**Recommendations**

**The need for strong professional identities**

One of the aims of a professional community should thus be to encourage a strong identity to enable practitioners to perform well and effectively, to increase motivation and job satisfaction (Baxter 2011:17), to form and maintain a robust community of practice that is in a position to set standards, and to achieve a sense of meaningfulness and job satisfaction. These qualities can counteract interpreter-related stressors such as burn-out, role-confusion, lack of autonomy/discretion, lack of recognition, lack of training and accreditation opportunities, lack of professional group membership, etc. A strong professional identity not only improves performance
(performance quality is critical to the professions interpreters are serving, it is not just an esthetical ideal), but also the sense of group belonging, a space in which to share ideas, experiences and problems. By this means, interpreters can improve working conditions and provide a sense of continuity as a profession from past to future.

Does a lack of a robust, clear-cut identity as perceived both by the professional and the surrounding community lead to an erosion of the professional self? Does it impact on professional salience and effectiveness? The answer to both of these questions is, this chapter argues, unequivocally yes, and it is therefore crucial to support measures at all levels – training, recruitment, accreditation – to enable a solid professional identity. Interpreting is developing rapidly in the direction of increased professionalization in all sectors, as witnessed by a burgeoning literature (which in itself is testimony to a strong basis of academic research), an increasing number of international conferences dedicated specifically to sub-sectors of interpreting – a wide range of training opportunities, codes of ethics and standards of practice that are increasingly sophisticated – in contrast to the early reductive and overly prescriptive norms, and accreditation systems in many countries around the world. And in those countries that as yet have a very ill-defined professional status and a loosely connected professional community, significant improvements are being made too, not least with the encouragement of pan-national policies (for example the 2010 European Union directive on translation and interpreting in the legal sector). Whether or not the political, social and cultural factors will foster these trends in the future remains to be seen and depends on many unpredictable factors – not only political developments but demographic and migratory developments, in turn based on push-and-pull factors of migration such as war, natural disaster, ecological changes, political developments, the distribution of resources, and economic crises.

**Implications for training**

There are links between training, prestige and status, i.e. trainees’ perception of themselves as future fully-flushed professionals and of the prestige and status of their respective professions. The data also suggest that competence assessment coincides with identity enrichment strategies and that perceived competence is related to learning through work (‘you learn the most about surgery by doing surgery, there’s no replacement’; Pratt et al. 2006:258). This principle is perfectly applicable interpreting and suggests that giving trainees professionally relevant tasks might speed up learning cycles and the perception of professional integrity. In conference interpreting, this has already been established, but in the emerging sub-disciplines that have fewer training opportunities, practical training programmes should be boosted.

If the first and most profound imprinting of professional identity takes place during the training period, the degree to which a training curriculum is standardized or semi-standardized will impact deeply on the development of the individual’s professional self-perception and on the development of the profession collectively (see Chapter 25 on pedagogy). It should be recognized that the professional norms and codes of ethics reflect our cultural systems and belief. However, a base level of standardization for the profession *tout court* would encourage an identity consolidation process, not least in an era of increased globalization and internationalization. At the same time, there must be some acknowledgement of the need for flexibility in accommodating the needs of the institutions interpreters work with, the cultures they work within, and the peculiar characteristics of some of the more ‘special-needs’ areas. Such flexibility can be introduced at the training stage, but also through role models in a successive phase where the less clear-cut ‘real-life’ demands of an interpreting situation can be observed and internalized. Validation through peer feedback and through role models is also an important means of strengthening professional identity.
Future directions

It has been mentioned above that it is difficult to see which changes interpreting might be subject to in the coming decades, partly as a result of technology that will probably pave the way for profound changes in the discipline. Referring to the translating profession, Dam (2013) shows in a social-constructivist approach how the profession(al) is developed and arguably constructed through the social media, specifically blogs: ‘they blog for empowerment’. Dam’s results show how weblogs enhanced the translators’ and the translation profession’s status as well as being a vehicle for networking, building communities and bringing visibility to other translators and to the translation profession.

Communication technology is likely to become a powerful tool of identity formation for the translating and interpreting profession, as for many other professions in the future. The accessibility of the Internet to all users, bypassing the gatekeeping function of other identity-forming fora and communication channels such as academic publishing and professional associations, is both positive and ‘democratic’. It can exponentially increase the statistical representation of the views expressed, but its very freedom means that there is no controlling filter in the form of carefully reflected and peer-reviewed claims, but a more spontaneous and immediate discourse system that the blog permits. Social media are thus a powerful identity-constructing channel for the future of the interpreting profession, and as Dam claims for the translation profession, a discourse that can itself contribute to the development of the profession. In other words, more visibility and empowering discourse on issues of professionalism increasingly consolidate the profession through that discourse: ‘I assume that blogging translators contribute to changing (or perpetuating) existing perceptions of themselves and their profession – including their occupational status – by talking or writing about these issues in a certain way’ (Dam 2013). This is certainly an encouraging and empowering opportunity also for the interpreting profession.

Moving in the direction of more collaboration with the institutions with which interpreters work – at the same time maintaining a distinctive professional identity and autonomy – will be a major challenge, because that collaboration is essential, as Garrett (2009) reminds us, and the balance delicate. It is also possible, as Grbić (2010) observes, that new classifications resulting from sociopolitical changes will emerge and create new professional fragmentations, constellations, collaborations and partnerships. As it is, the neat distinctions between interpreter and translator, freelance/staff, and other binaries are undergoing changes, restructuring and ‘reshuffling’ (see Chapter 26 on non-professional interpreters). New hybrid forms of interpretation (live subtitling in the theatre, sign language ‘translating’; Grbić 2010: 112) await the profession in the future, and it will have to be solid enough and flexible enough to survive as a profession. Economic conditions and changing market demand might in the future favour different or less marked segmentation into sub-genres of translation and interpreting.

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Notes

1 Like many other professions, community interpreting is intrinsically linked to the institutions – public and private – it serves. The degree to which it is in a position to autonomously establish its own criteria in terms of mandate, code of ethics, working conditions, etc. depends on a number of factors, and varies greatly from country to country (dependency being greater in those countries in which the
profession is less established). The degree of autonomy depends also on the status–power differential – real, or as it is perceived by the public – differential between the community interpreting profession and the institution. In those countries where public funding is inadequate and this is exacerbated by a conservative immigration policy (little funding for immigrant-related services), this dependence is strong. In countries where the importance of community interpreting is recognized (partly mirroring national policies and national immigration history and tradition) and adequately funded and – possibly as a result of this – community interpreting has emerged as a strong autonomous profession with a very robust professional identity individually and collectively, this is much less the case.

2 There is a large body of literature on professional language that addresses language use in various professions and how discourse is constitutive of these professions and thus the professional identity of both individual and group, but this is not an issue that will be addressed in this chapter.

**Further reading**


**References**


—— (2013), A study of the occupational status of Danish EU interpreters as compared to Danish EU translators. *Interpreting* 15:2, pp. 229–59.


The chapters in this book have provided an overview of the multifaceted field of interpreting, starting with the history of the profession, a discussion of key players and an analysis of key research, and moving on to how interpreting is practiced, assessed and taught. Along the way, the reader has been introduced to the different interpreting modes and settings, ethical issues, applications of technology and other professional concerns. It is clear from what is presented here that the field of interpreting is growing increasingly complex and specialized.

Despite the great variety in the venues where interpreters work and the differing expectations others have of them, this book also highlights a number of commonalities: all interpreters, regardless of where and how they work, must be acutely aware of ethics and of professional issues such as working conditions, relationships with interlocutors, the application of technology, and vicarious trauma. Similarly, the findings of research in one aspect of the field may be applicable to many others as well. Consequently, there is considerable overlap among the chapters as they address the role of the interpreter, user expectations, interpreters’ professional status, quality standards, research findings and interpreter education.

Part I of the book has shown that interpreting has occurred across the millennia on all continents, and interpreters have participated in almost all major events in human history. Baigorri has not only described the contributions of interpreters throughout history, but he has also identified patterns and made conclusions about the development of the field. He has also emphasized the critical role played by memoirs in providing a record of historic events from different perspectives. In this very first chapter of the book, we have witnessed the evolution of technology as applied to interpreting, an issue that emerges repeatedly in later chapters. Boëri and García-Beyaert have shed light on how the profession has been shaped by interpreters themselves and their professional associations, on the one hand, and by government and international institutions and policymakers, on the other hand. We have seen the impact of power disparities and market forces on the profession, and discovered the importance of cross-pollination among practitioners of multiple professions in ensuring that communication takes place. The latter theme recurs in Pöchhacker’s discussion of research when he stresses the need for an interdisciplinary approach to exploring all the facets of the interpreting process. He also warns of the dangers of the “technologization” of interpreting while also reminding us of the new avenues of research opened up by new technologies.
We have been introduced to the different modes of interpreting in Part II of this volume, each with its own unique features and challenges. Nonetheless, similarities are also apparent in the discussions of technology, for example. Seeber has explored simultaneous interpreters’ adaptation to changing technology, and transformations brought about by technological innovations have also been mentioned by Takeda and Russell with respect to consecutive interpreting and by Chen with respect to sight translation. The entire practice of transcription and translation, as Valero-Garcés has illustrated, is dependent on the use of technology, and the globalization that goes hand in hand with technological development has increased the need for multilingualism in research, journalism, entertainment and criminal investigations. With all the new applications of transcription and translation, practitioners are becoming increasingly specialized, a phenomenon that is noted in other chapters as well.

Also in Part II, the implications of communicating in visual or signed languages have been explored. In Bontempo’s chapter, issues of technology and globalization arise once again as she discusses the history of sign language interpreting and the evolving role of the Deaf community. She demonstrates the impact that the users of interpreting services can have on the professionalization of the field, and notes how market forces influence the practice of the profession in a variety of ways. Bontempo brings up some aspects of sign language interpreting that distinguish it from spoken language interpreting (such as repetitive stress injuries), while Napier, revisiting those differences, also emphasizes the similarities in the issues faced by sign language and spoken language interpreters alike.

Moving on from the modes of interpreting, in Part III we have explored the various settings in which interpreters perform their work. Once again, recurring issues can be seen regardless of whether the interpreting is done in an international conference, a courtroom, a hospital, a school or even a battle zone. Diriker returns to the professionalization issues mentioned earlier by Boeri and García-Bayaert, examining how they have come into play in different international venues, and she brings up the challenges posed by the large number of languages that must be accommodated at international gatherings, contrasted with the use of English as a global language. The need to address a multiplicity of languages is also mentioned in the chapters on court, asylum, community and medical interpreting, as these occur primarily in countries with large immigrant populations. Diriker’s discussion of standard setting for conference interpreting is also echoed in the following chapters, as interpreters in each setting tailor standards to their specific needs without abandoning the fundamental principles of quality interpreting. Other recurring themes throughout Part III, mentioned in particular by Lee in connection with court interpreting, Pöllabauer with asylum proceedings, Bancroft with community venues, Roat and Crezee with healthcare interpreting, and Bot with mental health interpreting, are the tension between cost-efficiency and quality, new applications of technology (especially with respect to remote interpreting), establishing role boundaries, and the need for both interpreter and client education. Smith’s analysis of interpreting in educational settings has brought us back to the role of external and internal players in shaping the profession, particularly with respect to legislation and government policies. Smith has also reminded us of the critical impact interpreters have on the users of their services, in this case schoolchildren.

Two areas that have only recently appeared on the scene in discussions of the interpreting profession have been covered in the last two chapters of Part III, Castillo’s piece on interpreting for the mass media and Moser-Mercer’s analysis of interpreting in conflict zones. The complexity of the mass media today can be seen in the illustrative tables created by Castillo to guide us as he takes us on a world tour of all the situations in which this type of interpreting is performed, from breaking news to sports to entertainment and beyond. Moser-Mercer has painted a more somber picture of interpreting around the world as she focuses on the myriad challenges – some of them life-threatening – faced by interpreters in conflict zones.
In Part IV, a great variety of topics have been covered in the broad category of issues and debates, beginning with Ozolins’s survey of the ethical standards applied in different sectors of interpreting. The ethical dilemmas raised in passing as Ozolins examines various codes and standards of practice come into sharp focus in Ndongo-Keller’s compelling description of the vicarious trauma to which interpreters are exposed in many settings, though she discusses the specific case of interpreters in war crimes trials. We have then been able to figuratively step back from the very up-close-and-personal approach merited by Ndongo-Keller’s topic as we moved on to Braun’s chapter on remote interpreting, which revisits the technology issues alluded to previously by several authors. Braun’s thorough analysis of the different applications of remote interpreting has highlighted the implications for interpreters themselves, in terms of working conditions and job satisfaction, as well as the impact on the effectiveness of communication among the parties involved.

Following up on the notion of effectiveness, Collados-Aís and García Becerra have helped us understand how the quality of an interpretation is defined and measured, and how varied the definitions of quality may be, depending on the perspective of the participant. In a similar vein, Jean Turner has introduced us to different types of assessment tools that can be used to measure quality or other constructs such as progress in training and readiness to enter the profession. Assessment is intimately associated with education, and Bao has shown us what prospective interpreters need to learn, how they learn it, and the different levels of training that exist throughout the world. In contrast, Martínez-Gómez has shed light on a field that has received very little attention to date despite the fact that it has existed since the dawn of time: non-professionals who end up providing interpreting services with no compensation and no training or preparation whatsoever. She discusses new research and suggests future avenues of inquiry in this field. The final chapter, Rudvin’s analysis of professional identity, has shown us how various professions view and define themselves, and the barriers that lie in the way of interpreters as they struggle to achieve a unified identity that distinguishes the profession while at the same time accounting for all the different types of interpreting that make up the whole.

This book is but a snapshot of interpreting as it exists in 2014, or rather, an effort to capture one view through an ever-shifting kaleidoscope. It is evident from all the topics covered here that interpreting has a bright future, despite the adversities that have emerged and will continue to emerge in a world that is both shrinking to the size of a village and at the same time rebuilding the Tower of Babel. Although no one can say for sure what the field will look like a century or even a decade from now, the authors have identified a number of trends that are likely to continue into the coming years. We know that technology will not stop its headlong advance, and that interpreters will be significantly affected by the use of technology in communication and, more importantly, will contribute to its constant improvement. Care must be taken to avoid the dehumanization and the loss of quality that often accompany technological “improvements.” In the future, the profession will no longer be pigeon-holed into rigid categories such as “conference interpreting” or “simultaneous interpreting,” but will change its face as the communication needs of the world evolve. Public awareness of the profession will increase as professional associations become more sophisticated and influential, and those who rely on interpreters to conduct business and lead their lives will learn better ways of collaborating with them for effective communication. Just as the practice of interpreting will be shaped by globalization and technology, so will research in the field as new techniques and approaches are developed and the academic disciplines in which that research is carried out expand and blend. Interpreter training programs will grow in number, expand in scope and become more effective in producing the practitioners of the future.
As a result of all of these developments, we will have a clearer perception of the interpreting process, its impact on human interactions, how interpreting skills can be acquired and maintained, and how interpreters can continue to grow and reap rewards in the profession. We hope that the reader, having read just one or many or even all of the chapters in this volume, has come away with a better understanding of this fascinating field.
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