

ROUTLEDGE ADVANCES IN TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETING STUDIES

The Changing Role of the Interpreter

Contextualising Norms, Ethics
and Quality Standards

Edited by
Marta Biagini, Michael S. Boyd
and Claudia Monacelli

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The Changing Role of the Interpreter

This volume provides a critical examination of quality in the interpreting profession by deconstructing the complex relationship between professional norms and ethical considerations in a variety of sociocultural contexts. Over the past two decades, the profession has compelled scholars and practitioners to take into account numerous factors concerning the provision and fulfilment of interpreting. Building on ideas that began to take shape during an international conference on interpreter-mediated interactions, commemorating Miriam Shlesinger, held in Rome in 2013, the book explores some of these issues by looking at the notion of quality through interpreters' self-awareness of norms at work across a variety of professional settings, contextualising norms and quality in relation to ethical behaviour in everyday practice. Contributions from top researchers in the field create a comprehensive picture of the dynamic role of the interpreter as it has evolved, with key topics revisited by the addition of new contributions from established scholars in the field, fostering discussion and further reflection on important issues in the field of interpreting. This volume will be key reading for scholars, researchers and graduate students in interpreting and translation studies, pragmatics, discourse analysis and multilingualism.

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Introduction

The Changing Role of the Interpreter Contextualising Norms, Ethics and Quality Standards*

*Marta Biagini, Michael S. Boyd
and Claudia Monacelli*

The development of the interpreting profession over the past two decades has become diversified, as reflected in the contexts where interpreter-mediated interaction takes place: from international organisations to the variety of institutional settings at a national level. The profession has thus come to face numerous challenges in terms of what kinds of new clients there are, what languages are increasingly being used at national and the international levels and what cultural communities are more and more involved when public service interpreting is provided. Such variety undoubtedly influences the norms, ethics and quality standards in place. In fact, now—more than ever before—in the constantly changing and expanding field of interpreting, such issues beckon attention and have served as the inspiration for the present volume. As editors of this volume, our aim has been to approach the notion of quality through interpreters' self-awareness of norms at work within any sociocultural context. This implies an emphasis on contextualised ethics—i.e. contextualising norms and quality in relation to self-perception and each practitioner's ethical behaviour. Here we aim to take this premise one step further and critically examine how research now addresses these constructs.

Moreover, research cannot reject the fundamental premise that the public at large has—at one point in time or another—been exposed to the work of interpreters or has had to rely on their work. To this end, our volume is also informed by the public's preconceptions of what professional expertise in the field actually is. This implies that potential consumers of interpreting services may be influenced by certain expectations of what the provision of interpreting should be and by the knowledge of this profession that may be gleaned from our cultural backgrounds. Our choice to cover varied professional contexts, along with the intention to include an extended geographical representation in terms of research in Interpreting Studies, is aimed at providing a multidimensional overview of this dynamic area of research.

The chapters in the work are therefore a reflection of the polyphonic nature of this field. In order to better frame the changing role of the interpreter, the backbone of the volume is formed by three thematic areas with

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each part containing three chapters. Part I highlights the dynamic socio-cultural perspective of interpreting, Part II discusses ethical challenges to professionals in changing professional contexts and Part III focuses on contextualised norms and related quality standards. Part IV, the last section of the book, also consisting of three chapters, opens the floor to a discussion in which renowned authors, acting as discussants, provide a reflective and, at times, critical view of the issues dealt with in the volume.

Of the contributions in the first three parts of the volume, we see the first (Chapter 1) and last (Chapter 9) chapters as framing our overall perspective—i.e. much of what happens in interpreting contexts indeed has a place in the “collective identity” (see Chapter 10)—often rife with stereotype. Typically, when someone imagines an interpreter as a world-travelling professional with a high-powered lifestyle, often misconstrued and romanticised to the point of constructing the professional role as one of inaccessibility. This creates, on the one hand, fertile ground for fictionalised accounts in both literature and film. On the other, in research circles, the notion of inaccessibility often has to be reckoned with and explored, since ethical issues concerning confidentiality abound. Thus, in Ben-Ari’s chapter, “Fictional vs. Professional Interpreters” (Chapter 1), the (mis)representation of interpreters in fiction as well as their analysis by professionals are explored. In Monacelli and Boyd’s chapter (Chapter 9), we see that analysing confidential settings can box researchers into constructing simulated data from which potential norms at play and the ethical choices made can be understood, leading to a tangible product where the resulting overall quality may be examined. Their work, however, also brings into question the validity of simulated data in Interpreting Studies. Such an approach, then, can be envisioned as relating to the construct of ‘in/accessibility’ which can be reimagined in terms of a gradient along a continuum: from accessibility through fiction to inaccessibility in confidential settings, as they are defined by the notion of simulated or, to go one step further, fictionalised encounters. Indeed, Chapter 1 deals with fictional contexts which defy scientific research, while Chapter 9 directly involves those contexts and realities that—by their very nature—are unavailable for scientific scrutiny, which ultimately raises the issue of research validity done on simulated encounters staged in these contexts. However, even in studies involving a final (interpreted) product, it is almost impossible to understand exactly what happens during the act of interpreting. Legal, ethical and practical reasons often bar analysts from having access to authentic settings where interpreter-mediated encounters are held, making it often necessary to recreate such encounters in a simulated environment.

The intervening chapters in the first three parts of the volume (Chapters 2–8) provide a number of different approaches to the questions addressed in the volume. Both of the remaining chapters in Part I deal with how the profession is portrayed through different means. In Chapter 2, Paola Gentile provides a socio-historical perspective of interpreting as a postmodern

profession. She speculates that the speed and flexibility particular to the globalised era has created the backdrop for the development of conference interpreting. This implies the forceful onset of the mass media as well as the technological advancement that have both served to defined—in many respects—who the interpreter is (in our mind's eye) and how we go about our work. Paola Gentile shares her view of the historical evolution of the professional profile of conference interpreter, opening a window to the multiple changes that have transpired throughout the years and discusses potential implications for the future. In Chapter 3, Cornelia Zwischenberger carries out a study of conference interpreters' social role as construed through professional self-perception. She points out that the concept of social role has always played a decisive role in the evolution of community interpreting research without, however, the role concept being sufficiently problematised in conference interpreting research. Starting from the premise that social norms constitute an integral part of any role-related expectations and thus of the construct of quality too. Her theoretical discussion is highlighted by the results from a survey undertaken among members of different professional associations.

In Part II, the issue of ethical challenges emerges in relation to a changing professional role. Annette Miner (Chapter 4) examines the role of interpreters who work with Deaf professionals. The author describes how these interpreters—known as designated interpreters—come to perform specialised duties as a result of working in this specific context. Through a series of interviews, interpreter and professional respondents both discuss the unique role that interpreters have in these professional settings, as well as the unique relationship that develops between the interpreter and the Deaf professional. In Chapter 5, Graham Turner and Brett Best draw attention to the 'inconsistent' nature of the interpreter's role, as illustrated in the literature and debate fora. They deal specifically with the medical community and make a parallel between the notion of 'defensive medicine' and, by analogy, ensuing 'defensive interpreting', stressing that, while ultimately serving the interests of the practitioner, the interests of the consumer fall by the wayside. They describe professional practices as being on a cline from defensive interpreting to effective professional (expository) interpreting, the latter ultimately more appropriately serving the interests of consumers. In Chapter 6, Şebnem Bahadır posits the position of the interpreter as a third party in communicative settings originally staged for two parties. In so doing, she introduces the notion of the interpreter as a professional participant observer. She distinguishes an interpreter's self-perception and presentation in professional contexts as being linked to education and ethics on the job. She suggests a more critical look at the overall picture in order to rethink the interpreter's position.

Part III focuses specifically on norms and quality in the changing profession. Christina Schäffner (Chapter 7) discusses the implications of dealing with conceptual metaphors in conference interpreting. Conceptual

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Metaphor Theory, while widely applied in other linguistic fields, has generally been lacking in Interpreting Studies. She focuses her analysis on metaphors and essentially raises the question of how simultaneous interpreters deal with them. She discusses the possible higher cognitive effort needed by interpreters to deal with metaphors and the strategies adopted. She goes on to discuss the possibility that any strategic move may be seen as evidence of norms. In Chapter 8, Eugenia Dal Fovo considers norms and ethics in light of data from television interpreting. Her multimedia parallel corpora analysis draws on a number of televised U.S. political events with the aim of identifying discourse elements in both ST and (Italian) TT. Her study aims to identify discourse elements which operationalise the principle of infotainment, which she considers as the merging of agendas between politics and television. As noted earlier, in Chapter 9, Claudia Monacelli and Michael S. Boyd consider the role of ethics and norms in Interpreting Studies on a number of different interrelated levels, with a focus on the contextual constraints encountered by interpreters in civil proceedings mediation. The study draws on simulated data from the EU-funded project Understanding Justice focusing on the differences apparent in bilingual mediation that employ mediators as interpreters compared to professional interpreters in the same role. The authors surmise the potential need for more prescriptive norms for interpreters in civil mediation settings.

Finally, the discussants in Part IV provide an overview of what they considered to be the most important issues to emerge from the individual chapters. Their contributions will be discussed in an afterword in which we make some general observations about themes presented in Chapters 10–12 and then return to Chapters 1–9 in light of the discussants' observations. We then attempt to sketch a possible route for future research.

Note

- * While this introduction was created by the three editors, M. Biagini was mainly responsible pp. 1 and 4, M. Boyd for p. 2 and C. Monacelli for p. 3.