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in a Changing  
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*edited by*  
Christina Schäffner  
Krzysztof Kredens  
Yvonne Fowler

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# Interpreting in a Changing Landscape

Selected papers from Critical Link 6

*Edited by*

Christina Schäffner

Krzysztof Kredens

Yvonne Fowler

Aston University



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# Interpreting in a changing landscape

## Challenges for research and practice

Christina Schäffner, Krzysztof Kredens and Yvonne Fowler

Aston University

### 1. Introduction

When, in early 2008, we came up with the theme of the sixth Critical Link conference our aim was merely to respond in a well-meaning inductivist fashion to a reality whose changing nature was certainly bewildering but seemed conceptually manageable. We felt it was time to take stock of what globalization processes, new human migration patterns and the resulting socio-political phenomena meant for research and practice in interpreting. Since then, the reality in which interpreters work has changed so much that our theme could not be more apt. The Critical Link 6 delegates held their discussions in July 2010, with the economic crisis rampant and the events of the Arab Spring just a few months away. Three years later the crisis is claiming ever new ground and political changes in the Arab world (but also elsewhere) seem to be far from over. The changing economic and political landscape has meant budgetary cuts and forced mobility. These in turn translate into a variety of new phenomena of relevance to interpreting, e.g. multilingualism in traditionally monolingual societies, the emergence of rare language pairs, or the need to revisit language solutions for immigration application procedures, social welfare institutions or prisons. Cross-cutting this cascading sequence are relatively old problems which have acquired a new urgency, e.g. the role(s) of the interpreter, emergency interpreting or the (mis)use of technology, to name just a few. In putting this volume together our aim has been both to introduce new, and revisit existing issues in interpreting research.

All papers in this volume were originally presented at the 2010 Critical Link conference and then re-written, refereed, and revised to be selected for inclusion. In this introductory chapter, we address some of the socio-economic and socio-political challenges providing the background to the contributions.



## 2. The impact of a changing world

A phenomenon with arguably the most far-reaching implications for interpreting practice in its entirety is that of countries, especially European ones, which have not hitherto been immigration destinations (e.g. Italy or Spain) now finding themselves receiving migrants escaping poverty and war. Many of them speak languages of lesser diffusion such as Amharic, Tigrinya and Tamil. Similarly, the enlargement of the European Union has meant new challenges for a number of Western European countries, where diverse and sizeable migrant populations have been arriving from Eastern Europe since 2004. The full implementation of the Human Rights Act (2000) in the UK and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD), together with the recent EU Directive (2010/64/EU) on the right to interpreting and translation in criminal proceedings which will come into force in the Autumn of 2013 (see Martin and Herráez, this volume), means that public services need to adapt more than ever before to the needs of a multilingual society.

Coincidentally, all this is taking place at a time of a global financial crisis. All over Europe public services are being affected by significant cuts in expenditure; societies have been experiencing a protracted period of unprecedented financial austerity due to the diminution of the tax revenue base and problems of the world banking system. Large parts of the public sector are in many countries being outsourced to private multinational companies. In the UK, for example, this has had an immediate and disastrous effect upon the quality of court and police interpreting and even upon the very availability of interpreters. Many of the gains which had been made in the UK over a period of twenty years have been set aside by the government (for example, formal qualifications and training for legal interpreters, the establishment of the National Register of Public Service Interpreters and the National Agreement on Arrangements for the Use of Interpreters, Translators and Language Service Professionals in Investigations and Proceedings in the Criminal Justice System, 2007) and the very future of the profession now seems quite bleak. Similar developments are being reported from other countries in the world.

## 3. Reflecting on the status of interpreting and the role of interpreters

Whilst activists, who are often both academics and practitioners, remain defiant on the political front, there is still no universal agreement on what the role of the interpreter should be, as evidenced by some of the papers in this volume. Should the role differ according to setting? Is the role of the interpreter as a cultural mediator acceptable in some settings but not in others? Does interpreter-mediated

communication always involve cultural mediation? What is the relationship between ethical practice and interpreting?

Questions about the role of interpreters are linked to the question of what interpreting is nowadays. Within the discipline of Translation and Interpreting Studies definitions of interpreting have been changing. The same applies to definitions of translation, and, in fact, interpreting has often been subsumed under the label of Translation (Studies). The issue has been debated repeatedly whether Interpreting Studies could constitute a research area in its own right, separate to Translation Studies. Translation and Interpreting Studies has become the widely accepted label (see, for example, Pöchhacker and Shlesinger 2002).

When translation and interpreting became objects of more systematic research in the 1950s, both were initially defined in the narrow sense of transfer. The focus of research was the comparison of linguistic systems in order to identify the potential equivalent units (at lexical and also syntactic level) which would be readily available for transcoding a message faithfully into the target language. This view of translation and interpreting as a mechanical process was linked to a communication model which described meaning transfer from a source to a target via some channel (speech or written text), assuming no loss during transfer. The communicative partners involved were labelled sender and receiver, with the translator or interpreter in the middle as a conduit transferring the message.

In the development of interpreting research specifically, the initially dominant conduit model has been challenged by researchers focusing on the triadic nature of interpreting as interaction (Wadensjö 1998; Mason 2001). Investigating interpreting (and also translation) as interaction automatically means including in the analysis the socio-cultural, institutional and situational context as well as actual people in their respective roles and power positions. As a consequence, translators and interpreters have been featuring much more prominently in the literature and new research questions have been asked. In Interpreting Studies, this focus on the role of the interpreter has been much more prominent for Public Service Interpreting (PSI) compared to Conference Interpreting, since the variety and unique nature of public service settings pose more challenges for interpreters. The conduit model, although still seen by a large number of PSI users as the only one valid, has in Interpreting Studies research been either replaced or complemented by models with the interpreter as an intercultural mediator, a culture broker, or a co-therapist (see especially the papers in Part I of this volume). This shift in theoretical reflection is largely motivated by the changing landscape of PSI practice. With countries becoming more and more multilingual and multicultural, PSI needs are growing, and the complexity of contexts and settings (police interviews, probation meetings, asylum hearings, healthcare, education etc.) as well as individual life stories and social profiles (refugees, prisoners, disabled people)

suggests that the traditional view of interpreters as neutral language mediators (which is also still the dominant view in most professional codes of conduct) does not fit reality anymore. It therefore comes as no surprise that a large proportion of papers in this volume are devoted to exploring the role of interpreters in various PSI settings. Indeed, we see this as only natural and timely.

#### **4. Making sense of a changing landscape: The contributions**

The topics of the papers are certainly also a reflection of the sociological turn in Translation and Interpreting Studies whereby focus on settings and people in increasingly multilingual societies is deemed more important, or at least more pressing, than focus on language per se. This shift is evident also in the research methods; the authors have used (semi-structured) audio- and/or video-recorded interviews with interpreters, PSI users and other stakeholders, questionnaires and transcripts of audio- and/or video-recorded interpreter-mediated interactions, reports and documents related to the interpreter-mediated event, text-based material (e.g. reflective reports), and observations.

We have grouped the papers into four sections designed to help make sense of the socio-political and socio-cultural issues in their relevance for interpreting practice and training. The papers explore how social and institutional conditions impact actual interpreting behaviour and what consequences this has for the perception of interpreting and interpreters by professional groups and by society more generally.

##### **4.1 Part I**

The papers in Part I of this volume address the impact of political and economic changes on interpreting roles, communication strategies, ethics and practice.

**Erik Camayd-Freixas** provides an account of his own work as an interpreter during the now infamous 2008 Postville immigration raid. He explains his own conflict between the assumed professional role as an interpreter, an officer of the court, and as a citizen. These respective roles are linked to divergent ethical duties. He gives an overview of the development of codes of ethics in relation to main traditions in ethical theory (deontology, consequentialism, moral sentiments, and virtue ethics) and examines their intrinsic and interpretive limitations. He argues that the changing landscape caused by immigration has led to an erosion of democratic principles, which makes an in-depth revision of interpreter codes

necessary. The Interpreter Code of Ethics of the Massachusetts Trial Courts is recommended as a model.

**Uldis Ozolins** argues that although basic ethical rules have been set down in various codes, there is hardly any recognition of how ethical issues are being played out in practice. His paper explores how thinking about ethics can be fostered in interpreter training, using as an example a training course in Australia. Role plays are undertaken between interpreting students and students of other faculties (from areas such as law, health, physiotherapy and social work). This has the additional benefit that also students from the other faculties are trained in working with interpreters. The interpreting students keep a journal of their experience of these role plays and also submit a reflective report. Ozolins analyses entries from the students' journals and reflective reports and illustrates how issues of ethics and role are illuminated by situations which challenge standard codes of ethics. These entries also illustrate a wider appreciation of the complexity of the interpreter's role, an awareness of crossing role boundaries, and the importance of a reciprocal understanding of roles. He concludes that for pedagogic purposes, the key to discussion of ethics must be understanding of not only the interpreter's role in certain settings, but also their role relationships with other professionals.

**Lluís Baixauli-Olmos** looks at the so far unexplored area of prison interpreting. On the basis of data collected through observation, questionnaires and interviews with interpreters and other stakeholders, he has identified specific contextual elements that condition public service interpreting in prison facilities, the main difficulties faced by interpreters, and the effect of these factors on the interpreter's ethics. Ethical dilemmas can be caused by primary participants expecting interpreters to carry out tasks beyond their duty, and also by interpreters themselves being uncertain about the course of action to take, which may happen when professional duties, ethical principles or personal and professional values seem to collide.

**Michal Schuster's** paper on language access in public services presents a sociological model for analyzing the development of language access and the factors underlying the public sector's inclusion of professional interpreting among the services rendered. Factors and forces which can facilitate the process can be an awareness of language-access solutions in other countries (for example as a result of professional contacts), community activism, political pressure, and media coverage. In applying her model, Schuster uses processes in the Israeli society since the 1990s as a case study, arguing that most of the services in Israel in 2011 are either in chaos or emerging awareness stages, with only a few institutions piloting professional interpreting services. She concludes that her model, which adds a sociological perspective to community interpreting research, can help action

researchers to “identify processes, actors, and forces involved and actively push the stakeholders to progress to the next stages.”

**Christopher Stone** reminds us of legislation which is relevant to the provision of sign language interpreting. His focus is on legislation in the United Kingdom, such as the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act and the 2010 Equality Act, both linked to the supra-national Human Rights Act and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. It is due to such legislation that interpreting provision is gradually becoming part of the socio-political agenda (a development which, incidentally, ties in with Schuster’s stages of emerging awareness and piloting professional interpreting services). Stone presents the results of a survey conducted in the United Kingdom, exploring interpreters’ and agencies’ awareness of the legislative documents and their understanding of requirements specified in them concerning who should work as an interpreter. He concludes that in order for sign language interpreting provision to improve further, the gains made in recent years need to be codified in domestic legislation, and local and national policies.

**Anne Martin** and **Juan Miguel Ortega Herráez** investigate how the role of interpreters and their performance during the Madrid train bomb trials was perceived by the legal professionals involved. Simultaneous interpreting was used at the trial, which is uncommon in Spanish courts, and the authors show that the legal professionals needed time to adjust to it. They perceived interpreters primarily as machines, in line with the conduit model, whether they performed in their role as interpreter or expert witness. Martin and Ortega Herráez conclude that closer cooperation between legal professionals and interpreters is needed in order to avoid problems of the kind that occurred during the trial.

## 4.2 Part II

As pointed out in the introductory comments above, the role of the interpreter has been a hotly debated issue in interpreting research of late. The papers in Part II of this volume address this issue explicitly, exploring the tension between interpreting and mediating/culture brokering.

**Hanneke Bot** and **Hans Verrept** investigate interpreting in mental healthcare. Their main argument is that due to their physical presence, interpreters can have a considerable influence on the course of the meeting between healthcare worker and patient. They present a model of the interpreter as a co-therapist as an alternative to the conduit and intercultural mediator models. Interpreting in this setting is seen as interactive, with the role of the interpreter being to ensure that the patient and the healthcare worker notice and act upon their mutual differences.

**Jules Dickinson** looks at perceptions and the actual role of sign language interpreters in the workplace. Her starting point is a change in the employment profile of deaf people in the United Kingdom, from traditional manual trades to, increasingly, office-based employment. Based on ethnographic data (transcribed excerpts of video-recorded interactions between deaf and hearing employees), she demonstrates the complexities of the sign language interpreter's position in workplace discourse, showing that even within a single interpreted interaction the role can switch between, among others, interpreter, assistant and co-worker. Such shifts can also mean that personal and professional boundaries are crossed and reflect the variety of power differentials in the relationship between the sign language interpreter and the deaf employee. Dickinson concludes that the pervasive perception of the interpreter's role as an invisible translating machine is insufficient for the situations in which they find themselves.

**Letizia Cirillo** and **Ira Torresi** explore child language brokering as a new practice in Italy. Italy has changed from an "emigration" to an "immigration" country, which means that the communicative needs of non-native populations with limited proficiency in Italian need to be met. The role of interpreters, or language brokers, is often performed by children. Using findings from semi-structured interviews with healthcare providers and general practitioners, the authors talk about the commissioning of interpreting services and institutional perceptions of child language brokering. They argue that research into such practices can also raise awareness of immigration-related issues, such as the inadequacy of available resources to meet the needs and ethical aspects involved in child language brokering.

**Raquel Lázaro Gutiérrez** investigates the performance of healthcare staff and untrained "natural interpreters" in Spain, where the provision of interpreters in hospitals and healthcare centres is not yet regulated. As a result, interpreting is very often performed by patients' relatives and other companions. Lázaro Gutiérrez reports on her study of doctor-patient conversations in situations where the non-Spanish-speaking patient communicates with or without the assistance of an interpreter. Based on her empirical analyses, she illustrates strategies used by doctors (e.g. using simple vocabulary, repetition, explanation, rewording) and concludes that the assistance of a natural interpreter reduces the asymmetry between healthcare staff and patients.

**Ingrid Fioretos**, **Kristina Gustafsson** and **Eva Norström** present a more general discussion of the role of the interpreter with a particular focus on the term "cultural broker", often used with reference to persons who have cross-cultural competences to explain and bridge cultural differences in multicultural contexts. Since professional ethics in interpreting practice precludes negotiation or trying to influence a certain outcome in an encounter, it seems that being an interpreter

and being a cultural broker are two different things. The authors approach the concepts of *culture*, *cultural competence* and *cultural broker* from the perspective of interpreters working in Sweden, whom they interviewed about actual events that had occurred during interpreted encounters. The interviews revealed that the interpreter actually cannot avoid the role of cultural broker and that it is intrinsic to interpreting itself.

**Ana Isabel Foulquié Rubio** and **Isabel Abril Martí** investigate the role of interpreters in educational settings in Spain. Like Italy, Spain too has seen an increase in linguistically disadvantaged immigrants, who should be guaranteed their right to education. The paper presents the results of a questionnaire-based pilot study designed to explore the perceptions teachers have of the communicative needs of immigrant children and their families, the current solutions being applied to address those needs, and ones the teachers would actually prefer. Since intercultural mediation is a new phenomenon in Spain, and as yet not recognized as a profession, the respondents' answers indicate that their expectations about what mediators can and should do are unclear and sometimes unrealistic. The authors argue that both intercultural mediators and community interpreters have an essential role to play in Spanish society but that a proper distinction between the two roles is essential.

#### 4.3 Part III

The papers in Part III address interpreting strategies in different interactional contexts, exploring the impact of setting on both global and local strategies as reflected in linguistic features. The settings in which PSI occurs and participants' perceptions of the role of interpreters are factors that determine the progression of the interaction, including coherence between the turns, but also the actual linguistic features of interpreted utterances. The papers which address these features do so on the basis of a descriptive analysis. They are not concerned with a detailed comparison of the original utterance and its interpreted output in order to evaluate interpreting quality, but their main aim is to investigate systematic links between the linguistic features of the interpreted utterances and the institutional conditions in which they are produced.

Part III opens with **Yvonne Fowler's** paper. She illustrates how new technologies can have an impact on interpreter-mediated interaction in multilingual Magistrates Court hearings. She specifically analyses the observable effects of prison video link upon court actors' (verbal and non-verbal) behaviour and comments on proxemics, behavioural adjustments, and interpreter strategies. One of her main findings is that prison video link interpreting reduces the choice of interpreting



strategies compared to face-to-face hearings and makes interpreters highly visible and audible and their performance much more transparent. She also identifies several problems related to sightlines, sound, and defendant back-channelling.

**Eva Ng** is also interested in courtroom settings. She has found that interpreters often use reported speech when they interpret utterances of legal professionals from English into Cantonese but use the first person 'I' in interpreting from Cantonese into English during trials in Hong Kong. Ng argues that this strategy has to do with power asymmetry in the hierarchical setting of the adversarial courtroom. Interpreters seem to be conscious of the power differential between the legal professionals and the lay participants in the judicial process. She also illustrates how a shift from first to third-person interpreting can have an impact on the speech act, for example rendering a direct accusation less confrontational.

**Raffaella Merlini** investigates politeness and face-work in the settings of health care, education, and the social services. Her starting point is that interpreters act as fully-fledged social agents, which also means that their image of self is at stake during the mediated communicative event. Face-work performed by the participants (both face-threatening and face-enhancing acts) is determined by the status, power and knowledge differential between the communicative partners, with the presence of an interpreter adding to the complexity of face-work dynamics. Merlini's main aim is to identify shared behavioural patterns as well as distinctive variations which may be accounted for in terms of distance and power.

#### 4.4 Part IV

The final part of this volume deals with the consequences of the changing socio-political landscape for interpreter training. PSI trainers are more frequently faced with new challenges: course participants are often immigrants themselves, they may have very different levels of education (ranging from basic education to doctoral degrees in specific fields), and their own economic status may differ (which is a problem if participants have to pay tuition fees). Nevertheless, it seems that research and practice in interpreter education have kept up with the changing reality.

**Miranda Lai** and **Sedat Mulayim** start by referring to changes in humanitarian intake patterns in Australia, which has seen increasing numbers of refugees. This development has resulted in an increasing need for interpreters and translators in a number of rare and emerging languages for government and community services, and thus also an increasing need for interpreter training. The authors present a programme offered at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and leading to a Diploma of Interpreting in selected rare and emerging languages.



Since the students are drawn from the very refugee communities that they are going to serve, they face the same resettlement challenges as other members of their own ethnic communities. The authors argue that the students have a dual role as agents and subjects of social inclusion, and that in their role as interpreters they will facilitate integration upon which social capital is built.

**Natacha S. A. Niemants** explores role-playing activities in interpreter training at an Italian university. Her starting point is the “ideal template” of dialogue interpreting in which there is a clear pattern of turns (A-I-B-I-A). She investigates to what extent, when and why participants depart from this pattern. Her interest is also in identifying differences in such departures in medical-themed role-plays compared to real data in interpreter-mediated doctor-patient interactions. Combining notions from Conversation Analysis and Interpreting Studies, Niemants illustrates various ways in which departures from the “ideal” pattern are interactionally negotiated by participants during role-play performances, and generally initiated by the examiner. She asks whether role-playing is a good way of introducing students to actually taking on new mediating roles in multicultural healthcare settings and concludes that if interpreting trainees learn by doing, they also need to learn *what* they are doing and *why*.

Finally, **Danielle D’Hayer** makes a plea for the profession of public service interpreting to be fully recognised and states that professional qualifications only carry a value if they are combined with appropriate education. She argues that PSI training courses in the UK mainly offer a skills-based approach but show little awareness of pedagogical principles. Her paper is thus an attempt to define a PSI education pedagogy. The main issues she addresses are changes in the younger generation’s approach to learning and accessing knowledge, changes in student profiles, situated learning which involves engagement in a community of practice, new technologies and learning environments, as well as remote teaching and learning. Similarly to some other papers in this section, D’Hayer argues that curricula need to be flexible and reflective in order to integrate changes in the continuously evolving profession. She also insists that educational philosophies and teaching approaches should be evaluated as to their effectiveness for new generations of learners, stakeholders should be consulted for curriculum design, and teaching institutions should lead the way towards the professionalization of public service interpreting.