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From 'Community Interpreting' to 'Discourse Interpreting': Establishing Some Useful Parameters

Contents

1   Introduction

In contrast to conference interpreting, which is today a fairly well-established discipline with its own research paradigms, the bilateral 'retour' interpreting of communicative events, often referred to as *community interpreting*, is still controversial as far as its concept and methodology are concerned. Its unclear conceptual basis becomes evident in the array of different expressions with different, often arbitrary foci which have made it difficult to position the interpreter's role in interpreter-mediated scenarios.

Against the background of a semasiological study of the common denominations to *community interpreting*, this paper positions it as *discourse interpreting* within the paradigm of discourse analysis as suggested by Wadensjö (1998), Roy (2000), Apfelbaum (2004), Bührig/Meyer (2004) and others, and proposes that highlighting and interrelating some key discourse parameters in their interplay in an actual interpreter-mediated situation can help to clarify the concept and lead to further investigations into the interpreter's role in interpreter-mediated communication.

2   *Community Interpreting*: A Problematic Concept

With globalization and the resulting migration problems, the complexity of the community interpreter's role in situations like court or police interpreting and the communication problems associated with the interpreter's presence and actions have come into the focus of discussion, leading to such opposing views of the interpreter as a 'verbatim' reproducer of messages in another language who is expected to render utterances 'verbatim', remaining 'neutral', 'invisible'', a "non-person" (e.g. Reddy 1979; Goffman 1981; Berk-Seligson 1990) on the one hand. On the other hand, there is the expectation that the interpreter actively manages the communication in the way of acting as a cultural mediator, rendering services of "advocacy" or "cultural brokering" (Giovannini 1992) or "conciliation" (Merlini/Favaron 2003: 212). The interpreter's mediating role has recently been described in the literature as "involvement" in contrast to the "content-orientation" in conference interpreting (e.g. Gentile et al. 1996; Opraus 2004; Pöllabauer 2004; Foley 2006). Its interactivity was underlined (e.g.

Wadensjö 1998) and positioned in the framework of discourse analysis (e.g. Roy 2000) claiming that the interpreter's potential interaction and mediation is influenced by a number of factors, i.e. his/her language and cultural competence, competence in a specific domain area and particularly communicative competence, referred to as "people skills" (Bowen 2000: 234) or as "discourse management skills" (Pöchhacker 2004: 187).

The debate of the community interpreter's appropriate role implies the question of whether and, more specifically under which circumstances and to which extent an interpreter is legitimate to 'mediate' the communication by rendering 'non-verbatim' utterances. To date there is neither consensus on the interpreter's role in an actual interpreter-mediated setting nor a consensus on which communicative parameters determine the individual interpreter's role within those two opposite views in a concrete interpreting scenario. While it may be true that a general *Code of Conduct* establishes rules of conduct on a collective basis, in an actual situation the individual interpreter is often at a loss as to how involved he/she should become (e.g. Mikkelson 2000).

Before suggesting parameters that will help to delimitate the interpreter's role, the variety of denominations of *community interpreting* will be introduced and analyzed.

2.1 Variety of Denominations

The most popularly-used term for bilateral, 'retour' interpreting today is *community interpreting*, which initially referred to institutional communicative situations associated with the immigrants' problems and sometimes included court interpreting (e.g. Mikkelson 1998). Alongside with the expression of *community interpreting*, a great variety of denominations has appeared with different conceptual components and foci (for an overview cf. Gile 1995; Pöchhacker 2000, 2004; Kalina 2002). Some initial agreements have been made on its difference from conference interpreting; however, even this distinction has become blurred by its alleged common features to consecutive interpreting (Kalina 2006).

The lack of conceptual clarity of the phenomenon of *community interpreting* has given rise to a great variety of denominations, which are briefly listed below with reference to the aspect of the activity that is verbalized (i.e. from a semasiological point of view):

1) Dialogue interpreting
verbalizes the aspect of dialogue and refers to a dialogic setting, not specifying whether this is in the courtroom, hospitals, public service, business or diplomatic situations. "(…) included under this heading are all kinds of professional encounters: police, immigration and welfare service interviews, doctor-patient interviews, business negotiations, lawyer-client and courtroom interpreting, and so on" (Mason 1999: 147).

2) Liaison interpreting
verbalizes the link or contact between different groups of speakers who do not speak the same language. In the literature, the term is used synonymously for "delegate interpreting" (Kade 1967: 9) or "escort interpreting" (Matyssek 1989: 7). The term does not explicitly verbalize a particular setting or communication scenario, although it is implied in Kade's and Matyssek's use of the term, which makes it possible to include a variety of settings, i.e. business, diplomatic and/or educational situations (Gentile 1996: 1).

3) Court interpreting, public service interpreting, medical or health care interpreting, business interpreting
reflect the situation-related (institutional) aspect in which interpreter-mediated communication takes place with the aspects of (bilateral) interpreting potentially implied in "interpreting". Different types of interpreting, i.e. simultaneous and consecutive interpreting

are sometimes grouped under these umbrella terms. For example, conference interpreting may also be researched within court interpreting, e.g. the Nuremburg Tribunal is considered as the starting point of simultaneous interpreting.

4) Ad hoc interpreting
focuses on the spontaneous aspect, implying a "face-to-face" situation (distinguishing itself from the note-taking in consecutive interpreting) without mentioning the aspect of setting. In the literature, this type of interpreting is often related to non-professional interpreting services rendered by whoever is immediately available such as medical hospital staff, family members (including children) or even other patients (Bührig/Meyer 2004: 1).

5) Telephone interpreting, TV interpreting and media interpreting
verbalize the aspect of the medium for communication with electro-acoustic and audiovisual transmission systems employed (Pöchhacker 2004: 21).

6) Sign language interpreting
implies different semiotic systems*,* i.e. interpreting from or into a sign language (such as American sign language, British sign language, French sign language), whereby a signed language "serves as the native language for the deaf as a group with its own cultural identity and the use of other signed codes, often based on spoken and written languages" (Pöchhacker 2004: 18).

In view of the above-mentioned expressions to *community interpreting*, despite their various lexical meanings, they share the following common denominators[1]:

(1) the aspect of bilaterality
meaning that the interpretation is rendered from a native language (A) to a foreign language (B) back and forth with a high degree of communicative competence required in the two languages both in terms of linguistic and cultural knowledge.

(2) the aspect of a communicative event
implying that this type of interpreting takes place either in an everyday or in a specialized (institutional) communicative situation.

There is consensus in the literature that the community interpreter is required to be competent in the relevant language and culture (a pre-requisite for the bilaterality aspect) and in the communicative process of everyday and domain knowledge of an institutionalized communicative situation. The domain knowledge is often equated with terminological knowledge but recently has also included norms and conventions, e.g. in legal discourse (e.g. Berk-Seligson 1990; Mikkelson 2000; Hale 2004).

2.2 Community Interpreting and Discourse

Along with Wadensjö (1998), Roy (2000), Apfelbaum (2004) and Bührig/Meyer (2004), we will proceed from the discourse dimension of *community interpreting* and position it within the framework of discourse analysis as established by Harris (1952), van Dijk (1985) and represented by Brown/Yule (1983), Busse/Teubert (1994), Rehbein (2001) and others.
    The common sense notion of "discourse" usually refers to a form of language use or more generally to spoken language or ways of speaking (van Dijk 1997: 1). It proceeds from the

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[1] The detailed aspect matrix analysis of different denominations cf. Gerzymisch-Arbogast and Jiang (2006a).

understanding that discourse is the result of an active communicative process, involving 'speakers/writers who have topics, presuppositions, and who assign information structure and make reference. It is hearers/speakers who interpret and who draw inferences" (Brown/Yule 1983/2000: ix). Such an understanding of discourse requires analyses which do not limit themselves to texts 'as a static object, but as dynamic means of expressing intended meaning' (Brown/Yule 1983/2000: 24).

The concept of discourse was introduced and developed in the community interpreting research field by Berk-Seligson (1990), Wadensjö (1998), Roy (2000), Pöllabauer (2004), Bührig/Meyer (2004) and Apfelbaum (2004) which yielded insights into:

- recognizing an interpreter's active participation and identifying an interpreter's feelings of antipathy or sympathy for specific factors as underlying causes behind their choice of verb voice (active/passive) (Berg-Seligson 1990);

- revealing that the dynamics of interpreter-mediated encounters are dependent on the interpreter's and the other interlocutors' background knowledge …and overall aims and interests to communicate (Wadensjö (1998);

- identifying the interpreter's participation in the process by organizing and managing the exchange of turns from different primary speakers' perspectives (Roy 2000) ;

- viewing interpreter's exchanges in terms of his/her "solidarity" (Pöllabauer 2004) or "footing" (Wadensjö 1998) with primary speakers;

- seeing an interpreter-mediated "constellation" as a cooperation between the three parties involved (Rehbein 1977) with connectivity often established by speakers and hearers (Bührig/Meyer 2004);

- attributing the interpreter a responsibility for achieving the global goals of the communication (Apfelbaum 2004).

It can therefore be said that viewing 'community interpreting' as a discourse activity has already been widely accepted in the interpreting research community.

3   Establishing the Notion of *Discourse Interpreting*

Against the background of this general acceptance we can now suggest the term of *discourse interpreting* to be defined as follows:

> *'Discourse interpreting' is a type of interpreting, in which non-specialized or specialized turns of exchange in discourse are interpreted biculturally or multiculturally and in which the interpreter - in the interest of the communicative partners and their communicative purpose - is co-responsible for achieving the communicative aims of the interchange by ensuring discourse coherence and through managing the discourse process according to a specified purpose of the communicative event.*

The settings in which the interpreter-mediated encounter takes place can be categorized as belonging to everyday or specialized discourse situations in Figure 1:
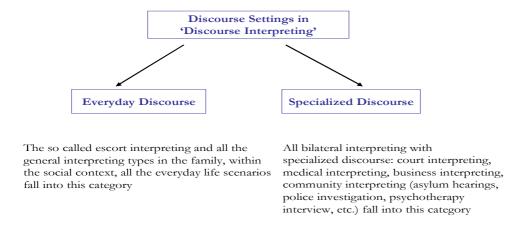
Figure 1: Discourse Settings in Discourse Interpreting

4 *Discourse Interpreting*: Some Useful Parameters

As *discourse interpreting* covers a vast range of scenarios, interpreter's role is often situated somewhere along the spectrum between "verbatim" and "conciliator". In the pertaining literature of *discourse interpreting*, different communicative factors/categories have been examined by scholars to investigate the interpreter's role latitude (e.g. "footing" researched by Goffman 1981 and Wadensjö 1998; "empathy" studied by Berk-Seligson 1990 and Gentile et al. 1996; "turn-taking" investigated by Roy 2000). In this regard, relevant categories can be deducted from discourse analysis to apply to interpreter-mediated communication:

1. the communicative situation (time, place, setting) including its purpose;

2. the communicative partners, their (overlapping) background knowledge profiles (everyday knowledge and domain knowledge) seen from a neutral analyzing observer's perspective, including their interest in the communication;

3. the interpreter and his/her (additional) background knowledge profile (everyday knowledge and domain knowledge), perspective and interest seen from an outside analyzing observer;

4. the communicative process structured in terms of the topic of the communication (if there is one) and the turns within the communicative exchange;

5. a message referring to an understood topic and its intended meaning as seen from the interpreter (interpreter's perspective) to fit the communicative purpose[2] of the exchange;

6. the activity of the interpreter in terms of the establishment and continuous control of connectivity[3] in a sequence of messages (acknowledging the perspectives of the primary speakers (their knowledge profiles, interest and hypothesized understanding of the message) in the interest of achieving the communicative purpose.

These categories will be later referred to as parameters[4] in order to investigate an interpreter's

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[2] The analysis of communication purpose cf. Sunwoo (2007).

[3] For a overview of continuous control of connectivity or sense continuity cf. Gerzymisch-Arbogast /Kunold/ Rothfuß-Bastian (2006) and Mudersbach (2004).

[4] The introduction of parameters in *community interpreting* cf. Jiang (2007a, 2007b).

action in a particular communicative situation. The introduction of these parameters with their interplay will be shown in a given scenario in Jiang (forthcoming).

5   A Sample Analysis

The following text given by Harris/Sherwood (1978: 157) will be used to address the importance of these parameters when analyzing an interpreter-mediated exchange.

> **Father to BS (interpreter):** Digli che è un imbecile! *(Tell him he's a nitwit!)*
>
> **Interpreter to the Immigration officer**: My father won't accept your offer.
>
> **Father (angrily, in Italian to daughter)**: Why didn't you tell him what I told you.

This exchange took place in a Canadian immigration office in the late 1970s, involving an Italian immigrant who cannot speak enough Italian to get his legal papers in Canada, relying on his bilingual daughter to interpret the conversation with an English-speaking immigration officer. Additional information of the context is provided in the reference:

> "BS (the Italian immigrant's daughter) immigrated to Canada with her family at 8 years 4 months. She was already trilingual. Within three months of her obligatory submersion in the Anglophone school and town of Welland, she was active in English and nearly a true quadrilingual. Nevertheless she continued to speak Italian at home and with family friends, most of whom were members of the sizable community of Italian immigrants in Welland…Language switching caused her no hardship; perhaps her previous trilingualism helped. On the other hand she found the move to a different culture a trying experience that left her feeling sensitive and insecure. In her relations with her family and the extra-family world she remained more conscious of culture switching than of language switching.
> "Her (the Italian immigrant's daughter) fluent English and her understanding of Canadian attitudes and mores bestowed on her important expert power as an interpreter. She was especially valuable to her mother, who did not learn much English. Decidedly her translating was socially functional. For ten years, until she left to go to University, BS translated, orally or in writing, phone calls, messages, conversations with visitors, mail, newspaper articles, etc. Indeed, she undertook almost all the written work that the family had to have carried out in English: filling out forms, composing business letters, etc. This broad range of NT (natural translation)—certainly as everyday as it was untrained—may be characterized sociologically as intra/extra-family, interpersonal, pragmatic and documentary. Linguistically the usual modes were semi-consecutive interpreting and sight translation, both of them two way.
> (Harris/Sherwood 1978: 156)

> "From 12 to 18 years BS performed the same functions for her uncle's family as for her own. She accompanied them to government perform liaison interpretations…Part of BS's role as informant was indeed as much ethnic as linguistic. As an intercultural 'mediating man', she tried to explain why things were done the way their were, both to her relatives from the viewpoint of the 'Canadians' and to her native Canadian friends from the viewpoint of Italians. Although from about 12 years she felt more at ease in her bicultural society and found culture switching easier, she was continuously conscious of translation difficulties caused by cultural differences.
> "Hard bargaining, as readers may well know, is one of the 'games people play' in Italy. An admissible tactic in it there is to call one's adversary a fool. Not so in Welland. BS's father would use her to liaison interpret for him at bargaining sessions with non-Italians. Father would get worked up in the Italian style and become angry and upset. BS would attenuate his outbursts in her interpretations, even at the risk of drawing some of her father's anger on herself.
> (Harris/Sherwood 1978: 157)

Using the above-proposed parameters we can now systematize what we have to know (i.e. what is pre-supposed) when using this example to show the interpreter's non-verbatim rendering of her father's message.

(1) What was the communicative situation?

It can be found that this exchange was within the larger context of the reference, i.e. it is an authentic interpreted exchange in a Canadian immigration office in the late 1970s. "Most of the data consists of individual case histories collected in North America" (Harris/Sherwood 1978: 155). Regarding the interpretation mode, it was stated in the reference that "Linguistically the usual modes were semi-consecutive interpreting and sight translation, both of them two way" (Harris/Sherwood 1978: 156).

(2) Who were the communicative partners? What were their (overlapping) background everyday and domain knowledge profiles (seen from an analyzing neutral observer's perspective), including their interest in the communication?

It seems that the Italian immigrant father (primary communicative partner A) can speak enough English to act in his own interest. Nothing is said about whether the Canadian officer (primary communicative partner B) knows any Italian which might complicate the situation. It is obvious that the father's interest is motivated by 'bargaining' to get his legal papers in Canada, also that he can be confident that his daughter acts in his interest.

In order to understand this exchange more thoroughly, several tentative hypotheses will be introduced complementary to the above-proposed parameters. Firstly, we can hypothesize (H 1) that the immigrant officer knows and observes the rules and regulations, the norms and conventions of his job as an immigrant officer. We can also infer (H 2) that this may result in conflicting interest between him and the Italian immigrant.

(3) What can we say about the interpreter and her (additional) background everyday and domain knowledge, perspective and interest seen from an outside analyzing observer?

It is mentioned that the daughter (communicative partner I) is at least bilingual and will probably act in her father's interest, "active in English and nearly a true quadrilingual" (Harris/Sherwood 1978: 156), "(…) she felt more at ease in her bicultural society and found culture switching easier, she was continuously conscious of translation difficulties caused by cultural differences" (Harris/Sherwood 1978: 157). We can hypothesize (H 3) that she does not think that the officer has enough knowledge of Italian that he could understand her father's message. We also hypothesize (H 4) that the daughter has no domain institutional knowledge in the legal context but enough everyday and/or communicative process knowledge for her to establish conflicting profiles and interest. Therefore, she will act in the interest of her father and achieving his communicative purpose – will try to manage the situation even if this constitutes conflicting interest to her – and avoid a break-down of the communication.

(4) What can we say about the communicative process structured in terms of the topic of the communication (if there is one) and the turns within the communicative exchange?

We can assume (H 5) that the topic of the exchange is obtaining legal papers in Canada and this probably involves a question-and-answer sequence of turns between the two primary communicative partners and the interpreter. Whether the communicative partners B and the interpreter are aware of this procedural structure is not clearly stated.

(5) Does the message referring to an understood topic and its intended meaning as seen from the interpreter (interpreter's perspective) fit the communicative purpose of the exchange?

It can be established here that the father's utterance does not directly relate to the topic and we can infer (H 6) that the father is angry about the procedure or the officer leads to a disrespectful remark. It is clear that it will not serve the communicative purpose of the

exchange.

(6) What is the activity of the interpreter in terms of the establishment and continuous control of connectivity in a sequence of messages (acknowledging the perspectives of the primary speakers (their knowledge profiles, interests and hypothesized understanding of the message) in the interest of achieving the communicative purpose?

The text does not give enough information, i.e. what the 'offer' mentioned by the daughter relates to in the communication prior to the given exchange, for us to judge the connectivity aspect (sense continuity) controlled by the daughter. It is obvious that it is a sense-constituting coherent reference (H 7). It shows clearly that the daughter attempts to 'control' the communication process by toning down her father's angry remark and in the interest of the communicative purpose of the father getting his legal papers in Canada.

This tentative sample analysis shows:

- that the daughter has controlled or 'managed' the discourse in the interest of the continuation of the communication process;

- that we need 7 tentative hypotheses (H) about the communicative situation, its purpose, its partners and their knowledge profiles and interests, about intended meanings, their connectivity and about the control of the communication process to thoroughly understand the text (as the rule in *bona fide* communication according to Grice's maxims[5] (1975).

This analysis has shown that addressing the parameters to understand how they interrelate to influence the interpreter-mediated communication process is a useful scientific approach to *discourse interpreting*. This is helpful for the investigation of intended meanings and how they contribute to the coherence of the communicative process (cf. Gerzymisch-Arbogast 2008 in this volume).

6   Summary and Perspectives

On the basis of positioning *community interpreting* within the paradigm of discourse analysis we have established *discourse interpreting* as a concept and identified parameters which will be helpful in *discourse interpreting* research. These parameters include the notion of coherence as an indicator of discourse management, both of which are interrelated to the primary partners' knowledge profiles and interests. These parameters need to be addressed when discussing a *discourse interpreting* scenario. The problem ahead is to systematize these parameters in their interplay with each other and establish whether and how the interplay of these parameters influence an individual interpreter's (potential) action in a particular communicative situation.

We hope that the identification and systematization of *discourse interpreting* parameters (1) will help clarify some of the controversial problems of research of interpreter-mediated exchanges; (2) serve as an indicator in studies investigating an individual interpreter's performance in terms of his/her action latitude in a particular communicative situation, and (3) provide some specific implications for the current general code of ethics for discourse interpreters.

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[5] Paul Grice (1975) proposed four conversational maxims that arise from the pragmatics of natural language. These maxims are: the maxim of quantity, the maxim of quality, the maxim of relation and the maxim of manner.

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