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Ebru Diriker (2004). *De-/Re-Contextualizing Conference Interpreting: Interpreters in the Ivory Tower?* **Series: Benjamins Translation Library, 53. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. pp. 223 € 99.00 ISBN 90 272 1659 2**

Description

Conference interpreters, understandably, approach debates with some trepidation. After a fairly uneventful passage interpreting a single speaker, when Q&A time comes they are suddenly thrust into the roaring forties of a myriad of different identities. "One speaker good, two speakers bad", to which we might add "more than two speakers – an identity crisis". How does a single interpreter cope with the cut-and-thrust of debate at a conference – trying to identify with a multiplicity of speakers raising questions, casting doubts, and crossing swords with - and without - a microphone? How does the interpreter react when the speaker or interpreter makes a mistake, or on hearing that ominous phrase "I'm not quite sure I understood your question, perhaps there's a problem with the translation (sic)". It is these and other related issues concerning the 'presence and performance' of simultaneous conference interpreters that form the basis of the book reviewed here, itself the published version of an eponymous PhD dissertation presented in 2001.

Within a field which is, according to the writer's own words, "dominated by cognitive, psychological and neuro-linguistic paradigms", Ebru Diriker offers a look into simultaneous interpreting (SI) as 'situated action'; i.e., "the position of conference interpreters as individuals and professionals working and surviving in socio-cultural contexts, and the interdependency between socio-cultural contexts and the presence and performance of conference interpreters" (p.2). In this sense it is a contribution to Interpreting Studies (IS) from the socio-cultural standpoint, more in line with the sibling field of Translation Studies, where the 'situatedness of translation' is seen as being given greater emphasis in the shape of descriptive translation studies, the skopos theory, translatory actions, deconstructionism, postcolonialism, and gender studies. Nearer to home, Diriker takes findings and hypotheses from court interpreting and community interpreting (where the role of the interpreter is seen as that of a cross-cultural 'facilitator' and active agent in communication) and applies them to the sphere of simultaneous conference interpreting (where the interpreter is generally seen as a competent professional identifying with the speaker, and applying 'performance rules' according to professional 'norms').

Contents.

 Chapter 1 provides an overview of the current literature on the subject, with particular emphasis on the extent to which Interpreting Research has approached SI as situated action. It looks at previous calls for, as well as actual research on SI in relation to socio-cultural and interactional

contexts. It also explores and comments on different definitions of 'context', and the difficulties in defining it. The same is done with 'discourse', the writer introducing the basic tenets of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), based on Fairclough and Van Dijk, that serves as the main theoretical framework. The conclusion is that in spite of calls from several quarters to look outside the 'cognitive paradigm', there are very few actual studies of simultaneous interpreting as 'situated action', the main thrust of interpreting studies being channelled towards the 'cognitive mechanics of processing' rather than on a 'holistic conception of text, situation and the entire course of action' in conference interpreting.

Chapter 2 provides an account of the wider socio-cultural context(s) in SI by studying the meta-discursive representation and self-representation of simultaneous conference interpreters and interpreting. The chapter both scans and comments on the codes of ethics and websites of professional organizations (interpreters' and users'), general reference books, academic literature, the Turkish press, and a popular book published by an active interpreter, with a view to establishing how simultaneous interpreters are represented and self-represented from the standpoint of expectations and performance, as well as ethics. The chapter finds that: different professional bodies provide varying degrees of detail of what they regard as ethical interpreter performance; there is an apparent contradiction in all codes between the requirement for "impartiality and fidelity" (with implications of passive subservience) and the need to 'facilitate communication' (implying active participation). In the more specific/contextualised representations, where interpreters recount real-life events, the involvement of interpreters in shaping the meaning tends to become obvious. However, in their self-representation, interpreter decisions to eliminate such 'impurities' as grammatical mistakes, distinct accents, and so on are not regarded as 'interference' or participation in shaping the message. Where there is acknowledged participation, this is regarded by interpreters themselves as being marginal to their main responsibility - fidelity to the speaker's "message".

Chapter 3 focuses on the narrower context of a particular conference (2-day colloquium on topic of "Martin Heidegger and Hannah Arendt: Metaphysics and Politics", Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, 29-30 May 2000). The aim of the chapter is to focus on simultaneous interpreters and interpreting in a particular event and seeks to understand how simultaneous interpreters are "positioned" in an actual conference context, and how this tallies with the meta-discursive representation and self-representation presented in Chapter 2. The chapter provides an analysis of the questionnaire-based interviews carried out amongst participants and interpreters, speakers, organizers and users of SI, concerning 'presence and performance of interpreters' at this particular event. The results highlight the diversity of viewpoints of organisers, speakers, interpreters themselves and users of SI with regard to the presence and performance of the interpreters. It is an account of the

different user expectations of an SI performance contrasted with opinions of an actual performance; interpreter's impressions of organisation and speakers are also included. The chapter also provides an account of the raft of problems and pitfalls awaiting a researcher out to gather authentic material for an empirical study.

Chapter 4, the longest in the book, gives us a glimpse of the other side of the coin. It analyses the same issues mentioned in Ch. 3 using transcriptions of recordings of the floor and the interpreting booth, where two interpreters (A and B) work from English into Turkish and vice versa. With these transcripts as a starting point, the writer seeks to investigate why, when and how interpreters 'shift the speaking subject', i.e. change from using the 'speaker's I' (or 'alien I', the norm in simultaneous interpreting) in their delivery to using the 'interpreter's I' (i.e. speaking as themselves, and therefore diverging from the professional norm) or else use reported speech when referring to speakers. Fifty-eight instances of such shifts are reported, though the writer concedes there may be more and of a more subtle nature. The analysis points to four "speaker positions" adopted by the interpreter as compared with the one according to the norm.
(1) Interpreter takes norm-based speaker position (first person singular, 'speaker I')
(2) Interpreter assumes speaker position indirectly by reported speech, paraphrase, explanatory remarks about speech on floor.
(3) Interpreter assumes speaker position implicitly (blends own remarks into first person of 'speaker I')
(4) Interpreter assumes speaker-position explicitly (inserts own remarks or comments in delivery).
The shifts themselves are not seen as random but following a clear pattern. They occur with (a) speaker/interpreter apologies, (b) speaker's/interpreter's mistakes, (c) overlapping/semi-verbal/inaudible interaction on floor, (d) problems with transmission of interpreter's/speaker's voice, (e) ambiguous or contradictory input on the floor, (f) language/culture-specific discussions or difficult word-connotations in one conference language on the floor, (g) references in non-conference language on the floor, and (h) accusations of misinterpretation from the floor.

 Chapter 5 juxtaposes and contrasts the analyses carried out in Chapters 3 and 4. In this sense it provides an account of how the meta-discourse on SI relates to the findings of actual SI performance at a real conference. An account is given of what the meta-discourse on SI suggests, followed by participants' observations on the presence of interpreters, and the performance of those same interpreters as suggested by the conference transcripts. As a result of these analyses, the chapter offers tentative hypotheses on the reasons behind the convergences and divergences between what is said and what is done in simultaneous conference interpreting. The main conclusions reached are: the 'mythical nature' (in

Barthesian terms) of meta-discourse on SI has been exploded by the reality of an actual SI performance; that this meta-discourse is purposeful in that it increases both the symbolic and shaping power of the interpreting profession - the former providing it with value as a marketable commodity, the latter aiming to impose specific "performance instructions" on insiders. By foregrounding the "ideal" interpreter, it seeks to bring actual behaviour closer to the most effective (i.e. commercially most viable) image of the profession.

Finally, mentioning implications for interpreting studies, the writer points out that the evidence challenges the widely-held view that conference interpreters work in homogeneous settings, even in technical meetings; points to the fuzziness of quality criteria employed in user surveys; challenges the cognitive paradigm in SI that seeks to explain interpreted utterances with reference to mental processes only; suggests that in SI we are dealing with a phenomenon of "meaning negotiated by the interpreter" rather than "meaning intended by the original speaker", thus involving the interpreter's own subjectivity as well as a variety of socio-cultural and interactional factors. The final conclusion is that the assumption that simultaneous interpreters access and transfer the meaning as intended by the speakers is too simplistic to account for the complexity of actual SI behaviour, and hinders more critical analysis of the process.

The Appendix contains the transcription conventions used in the study, and presents excerpts (original, interpreter versions into Turkish and English, writer translation if original in Turkish) and analyses of all 58 instances pointing to a "shift in the speaking subject" in interpreter delivery. It also provides an extensive transcript of the last 25 minutes of the conference to demonstrate the relationship between the shifts and the general flow of the conference.

Evaluation
This highly readable account of meta-discursive representation of the interpreter contrasted with a real SI performance is indeed groundbreaking in its approach, as described on the book's back cover. It is a pioneering attempt to bring into simultaneous interpreting studies findings from related fields such as court and community interpreting. In doing so it challenges the professional 'norm' in SI of fidelity to the speaker via accessing speaker's intended meaning and transferring it 'fully and faithfully'. This study claims that there is more subjectivity on the part of the interpreter than meets the eye (or ear).

Relatively jargon-free, the book can be read with profit by both interpreting professionals and researchers. Professionals will no doubt find the description of conference organisation familiar (though the particular conference under discussion seems to have had more than its fair share of problems for the interpreters). Researchers in the field of interpreting studies will recognise in this often disarmingly candid account the many

problems involved in gathering real material for an empirical study (so exhaustive an account that it may even be taken as a practical check-list) However, since this book is the published version of a PhD thesis, comments will concentrate on the academic side.

As regards the literature review, and as someone essentially unfamiliar with issues involved in court and community interpreting, I would have appreciated a rather more wider-ranging discussion of these two fields and the way the writer sees them impacting SI studies. Perhaps the short shrift given this section is a result of having had to condense this section from the original PhD dissertation, but I was left with a feeling of not having been provided with a solid grounding in the issues under discussion. If the aim of the writer is to open up a field which seems to be fairly well-established elsewhere (i.e. the interactive role of the court/community interpreter as opposed to the supposedly neutral positions taken by the simultaneous interpreter), it is not made clear what of ideas are "imported" from those fields, as is the tradition in Interpreting Studies (Cf. the 'heavy borrowing' in different interpreting paradigms mentioned in Lambert & Moser-Mercer, 1994). In addition to this, the section could also have benefited from reference to discussion of the issue of 'presence and performance' in publications not present in the body of the book or the bibliography such as Pöchhacker 2004 (although the current book was probably in press at the same time, there is an explicit mention of the "guidance and support" provided by this author) or Pöchhacker & Shlesinger 2002 (especially Parts 6 and 7).

Whatever its merits - and it has many - this study faces a problem faced by all interpreting researchers, that of basing conclusions and hypotheses on a very small number of opportunistic samples - in this case the performance of just two interpreters (the recording of a third was lost), with both inter- and intra-personal variations in the unit of analysis. Interpreter A is reported as being more self-effacing when dealing with shifts in the speaking subject; interpreter B on the other hand is described as being more forthcoming and prepared to shift. The latter is also attributed with the phrase "I don't care what comes out of my mouth, as long as it sounds good" (p. 74): this would be seen by many professionals as at the very least indicative of a fairly cavalier attitude towards the profession and, at worst, an un-called for and facetious remark. Neither is it made clear whether the two interpreters are actually members of any professional association, therefore feeling duty bound to apply ethical standards. It is a distinct possibility that the hypotheses and conclusions are weakened by these facts (the writer herself recognises the danger of extrapolating), especially when coupled with another statistical reality – are 58 instances of 'shift of speaker position' - representing perhaps 15 minutes' interpreting time, compared with 2 whole days' of interpreting where there were no shifts - sufficient to defend the hypotheses put forward? Or could those shifts indeed be considered as statistically marginal to the main activity, as mentioned by interpreters themselves?

The suitability of Critical Discourse Analysis - mentioned as the theoretical mainstay of the book - in a conference setting would also be questioned by some. Both Fairclough's (1995) and Van Dijk's later work is based on representation in media or institutional discourse where there is an ostensible power relation. The applicability of this approach to court and community interpreting can therefore be immediately seen; what is less clear is the ostensible power relation in a conference setting, where a guest speaker is usually regarded as a 'primer inter pares', and where debate can be vigorous and robust, indicating parity rather than disparity.

Some of the conclusions do not seem to flow naturally from the analyses carried out in body the book. Especially, the idea that the meta-discursive self-representation of the interpreting profession is self-serving for commercial purposes is a perfectly valid point, but equally true of all liberal professions.

Finally, this study also raises important theoretical and ethical issues. The main one is the Bahktin-inspired quote which claims "Receivers cannot access authorial intentions completely because each instance of language use contains more meanings, intentions and accents that its formulator may have intended and any single receiver can purport to have accessed" (p 23). This concept runs counter to those who claim that the interpreter's delivery transfers the 'intended meaning' of the speaker, suggesting that there is only one meaning, and that the interpreter is privy to it. The fascinating aspect of the Bahktinian approach is that it implies that the interpreter's version is only one of several possibilities(and perhaps not even the best, in view of the fact that lack of knowledge in many cases impedes access to full 'speaker meaning', whether intended or not), providing further support for the current study's hypotheses.

Finally, the issue of norms. In the meta-discourse of self-representation in simultaneous interpreting, emphasis is laid on objectivity and faithfulness. Filtering out what is considered 'unessential information' (mainly paralinguistic) is not seen as interference by the interpreter, but rather implicitly accepted as ethical in order to get to the 'intended meaning'. This notwithstanding, the very fact that the interpreter chooses to omit what is deemed to be 'unessential information' implies choice, and choice entails power. This would argue against the long-held view requiring fidelity, and suggests that the interpreter is in fact a much more active participant than is generally accepted, not only by making an obviously clear break by 'shifting the speaking subject', - the object of the present study - but probably in many more subtle ways, as is hinted at by the writer of this very welcome addition to interpreting studies.

One final comment on meta-discourse representation of interpreters in the Turkish media. There is a curiously intriguing comment in this section, describing interpreters as "Nice and virtuous ladies who smoke fags inside the booths" (writer's translation from the Turkish publication 'Milliyet', p. 40). No comment is made in the study on this, and none is offered here, except for the fact that the conference interpreting profession is predominantly female….

About the reviewer:

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