

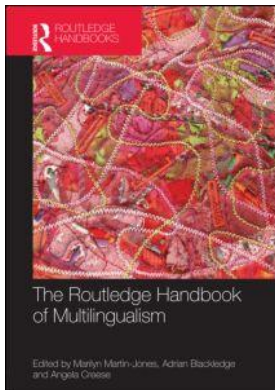
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Multilingualism and public service access

Interpreting in spoken and signed languages

Christine W. L. Wilson, Graham H. Turner and Isabelle Perez

Introduction

'Home', the adage declares, 'is not where you *live* but where they *understand* you'. In the twenty-first century, as people make and move their homes within globalized communities, new demands arise for those concerned to ensure social understanding. One consequence of societal multilingualism is the growing demand for translation and interpreting services. Such services may be offered for exchanges involving a migrant language or when both of the relevant languages are indigenous. Here, we focus on face-to-face interaction in multilingual settings where individuals encounter the state, and therefore on the work of public service interpreters as facilitators of communication between would-be interlocutors who do not share common linguistic ground.

Public perceptions of the role of interpreters tend to assume that linguistic structures are readily, indeed more or less automatically, transferable between languages and therefore that interpreting is a very straightforward, non-technical task. A significant body of research and scholarship now attests to the opposite view: interpreting is actually highly complex and can impose an extremely demanding cognitive and emotional load. The impact of such misperception can be seen at all levels of policy and practice. This account describes and reflects on the current picture before exemplifying the resulting 'state of play' in one increasingly multilingual country, Scotland. We suggest that, although management of multilingualism via translation and interpreting remains very much 'work in progress', some aspects of appropriately enhanced provision already exist here in respect of users of one of Scotland's indigenous languages, British Sign Language (BSL). Drawing together aspects of research and policy described in the literature, we show how both sign language (SL) interpreting and wider public service interpreting have progressed, and yet leave many unresolved issues pressing for attention as those who wish to be 'at home' in a multilingual society seek ways to ensure that they understand and are understood.

Interpreting studies

Translation and interpreting are often defined by professional organizations of practitioners as distinct and contrasting activities requiring different skills, as the former usually involves written

target texts that can be revised, whereas the latter deals with fleeting messages, conveyed orally or signed by the interpreter under time constraints and, therefore, with little room for error-repair or stylistic improvement. Whereas translation has a long history as a profession and has been extensively studied by scholars – albeit only since the second half of the twentieth century as a fully developed academic discipline (see Munday 2008 for an overview) – interpreting in some settings is still far from achieving professional status. Equally, interpreting research remained a little-explored subset of translation studies prior to the last two decades. However, in spite of clear differences in terms of the process used to transfer and deliver the message from the source to the target language, both activities involve careful analysis and understanding of meaning in context, as well as attention to extra-linguistic aspects of communication.

Some researchers have argued that it might be more useful to focus on what activities involving linguistic transfer have in common rather than on the traditional divisions within translation studies. Translating is then defined as a communicative process taking place within a social context (Hatim and Mason 1990) and, furthermore, as an act of communication that attempts to relay across cultural and linguistic boundaries another act of communication (Hatim and Mason 1997). Users of translation and interpreting services are often unaware of the distinctions and often expect the same practitioner to be able to perform both tasks. It is true that many professionals do offer a whole range of services, but those who are full-time employees of public organizations (from city councils to the United Nations or European Union institutions) tend to be specialists in one activity.

The field of interpreting studies tends to divide its territory into two primary subsets: conference interpreting, which often revolves around the simultaneous interpretation of longer stretches of monologue, and dialogue interpreting, where ‘bilateral’ interaction is more typical. Dialogue interpreting (DI) is not so extensively reported in research, nor is it perhaps so readily recognized by the general public. Its status is confused further by the fact that it may also be called community, *ad hoc*, cultural or liaison interpreting: Roberts (1997: 7–26) reviews these terms. Yet DI is probably the most common form of interpreting activity today. The interpreter is usually physically present, visible to all participants (unlike the conference interpreter who is often in an enclosed, soundproof booth) and mediates between two or more individuals who do not use each other’s language. (It is appropriate to mention two variants: telephone interpreting – increasingly used, for example, by the emergency services – and whispered interpreting or *chuchotage*, used in settings where full simultaneous interpreting is impracticable.) DI is used in environments such as business and diplomatic meetings, sight-seeing tours and educational or cultural contacts, as well as many situations in which people who are not fluent speakers of the official language(s) have to communicate with the providers of public services, such as in legal, health, education, government and social service settings. Interpreting in the latter contexts is specifically referred to as Community Interpreting or, as it is commonly known in the UK, Public Service Interpreting (PSI).

Dialogue interpreting studies

Interpreting studies emerged as an analytical enterprise in the 1970s and 1980s after a few early, speculative studies based on personal intuition with scholars such as Gile (1990) advocating a more scientific, less subjective approach. Recent times have seen the consolidation of key approaches, particularly those that adopt the insights of pragmatics and discourse analysis (e.g. Berk-Seligson 1990; Wadensjö 1998). A shift has been made towards a more analytical perspective on mediated communication as a whole, which advocates looking at the interpreter’s

output as text and discourse with a specific purpose and within a specific sociocultural context (Pöchhacker 2004).

To date, DI as a separate activity has generally not been associated with high professional status, except when performed in settings deemed prestigious such as those involving high level international business negotiations or court hearings. However, there are differences by region and country, as well as between language groups. For instance, dialogue interpreters are afforded higher professional status in Australia and Scandinavia than in other parts of the world. Likewise, with more stable client populations, those working with a SL may be more organized professionally than interpreters working with other minority languages. Serving state employees and members of linguistic minorities at local levels, and facilitating unglamorous exchanges that rarely occur before a wider audience, PSI tends to remain particularly low on any professional scale of reference. However, the more systematic and scientific research of recent decades is beginning to feed back into training courses for students and for interpreter trainers as well as into policy. PSI research is gaining momentum against a background of political interest, in the UK and elsewhere, across the whole range of issues relating to social inclusion and equality of access to public services, in particular in connection with the movement of immigrants, economic migrants and asylum seekers.

Face-to-face settings are de facto a major difference between DI and conference interpreting. Authors such as Roy (2000), Wadensjö (1998) and Roberts (1997) have pointed to the implications of this in terms of the interpreter's role, which they see as going far beyond being a mere 'conduit' allowing interlingual mediation, and extending to being an active, third participant in the communication event, with the potential to influence the path, manner and outcome of the talk-event. Debates surrounding the dialogue interpreter's role, including questions relating to footing and positioning (see Mason 2009 for a recent example), foreground issues of interpersonal and intercultural power relations between the participants in the interpreter-mediated triad, and thereby animate a key theme of multilingualism research, including the nuanced issues highlighted at the interface between the individual, representatives of the state and its institutions, and those – including the interpreter – seeking to find a position of equilibrium between the two (see Inghilleri 2004). The focus in DI studies on interaction (and therefore on interpreting as an inherently sociobilingual activity), as opposed to cognition (which inevitably foregrounded the personal bilingualism of the practitioner) led scholars in the field to draw on areas of sociolinguistics including conversational analysis and ethnography. PSI is often characterized by significant power differentials between the interpreter's canonical 'two clients' (one who accesses the service and one who provides it), for example, between the police officer and the interviewee or between doctor and patient. In this context, issues surrounding the ethical behaviour of all or any of the participants in the exchange, as well as the social psychological analysis of professional versus client attitudes, personal versus professional identities and impact on practice (e.g. advocacy) feature prominently on the current research agenda.

PSI in the UK and beyond

As in many other parts of the world, PSI emerged as a field in the UK in less 'glamorous' settings than conference interpreting and usually in connection with immigration (Gentile *et al.* 1996). This was highlighted by a number of speakers at the first conference organized by the European Babelea Association for Community Interpreting (November 1999, Vienna) where the PSI situation in a number of countries was reviewed. Corsellis (2005, 2009) confirms that the needs created through the increased mobility of people coming to the UK led to the emergence of public service interpreters involved primarily in legal, health, education, housing,

environmental health and social services. Interpreting in these settings can be characterized as ‘high impact’, as the interpreter-mediated exchanges may aim at making significant decisions related to individuals’ health, life, freedom and future prospects.

Public service interpreting is often carried out in circumstances that are far from ideal. Provision is not always professionalized and examples of *ad hoc* situations involving untrained interpreters (also referred to as ‘lay’, ‘natural’ or ‘informal’ interpreters who are frequently family members of the minority language user at the heart of the interaction) abound, particularly when rarer languages are used. Raising the profile of practitioners working in the public services so that they may reach equivalent professional status to the doctors, police officers and lawyers they work alongside is therefore a priority. This, in turn, requires consistent, accountable and transparent professional structures for selection, training and accreditation (Corsellis 2005). To date, progress has been made in this respect, albeit at a very different pace in different parts of the world, and as a function of the position in social and legal terms accorded to linguistic minority groups in the country in question. Initial steps towards the professionalization of public service interpreters were taken in countries such as Sweden and Australia in the 1960s and 1970s, whereas the UK began the process in the 1980s.

The two main UK-wide professional organizations for translators and interpreters are the Chartered Institute of Linguists and the Institute of Translation and Interpreting. Whereas the former administers one of the few existing vocational qualifications in PSI and is linked to a national register of practitioners, the latter provides industry and public services with a directory of its members. Both organizations now have SL interpreters (SLIs) as well as spoken language interpreters among their members. Efforts towards enhanced professionalization call for systematic, in-depth academic training. The publication of agreed *National Occupational Standards in Interpreting* (latest revision CILT 2006), which set out the knowledge and skills required to be a competent professional interpreter, may provide a way forward in this respect. The standards are designed to promote understanding of what constitutes the most professional and advanced level of interpreting performance (the equivalent of postgraduate outcomes in higher education) in a range of contexts. Such developments steadily cement an appreciation that PSI is not to be casually undertaken and that responding appropriately to multilingualism demands serious engagement.

Although new questions about PSI provision are being faced, they also naturally bring into focus the need to facilitate communication with Indigenous minority language groups. In many cases, the deepest-rooted and yet most overlooked among these groups may be SL users, to whom our attention now turns.

Sign language interpreting, focusing on BSL

It is now widely recognized that SLs are identifiable as complete, real languages amenable to linguistic description (Sutton-Spence and Woll 1999) in parallel with spoken languages. Contrary to common assumptions, SLs are neither universal nor unusually restricted in expression. Furthermore, they are not mere reformulations of spoken or written language: although such artificial tools as ‘Signing Exact English’ do exist, natural SLs are neither artificial nor do they replicate the structures of speech or writing, but exploit the inherent potential of their own visual-gestural medium. SL interpreting therefore aligns analytically, professionally and pedagogically with other forms of interpreting. As we shall see, SL interpreting is often practised in public service contexts, although its use is by no means confined to these situations.

When a hearing non-signer meets a deaf signer in the UK, the latter will typically be a user of British Sign Language (BSL). Although the deaf person almost certainly has some

understanding of English, this will predominantly be in the written mode: BSL has no common orthographic form and – despite the poverty of educational opportunity available to them, and the resulting difficulty in attaining fluency in English (Conrad 1979) arising especially from the historic rejection of BSL as a language of educational transmission – deaf people are expected to contend with the social world through written English in its many everyday forms. Face-to-face communication between deaf and hearing people in such circumstances can therefore best be effected via the intercession of a BSL/English interpreter. As such interpreters need to be able to hear the utterances of the speaking participant, they must themselves have functionally adequate levels of hearing.

SL interpreting differs in several key ways, however, from other forms. As we have noted, SL interpreting is exceptional in requiring the transfer of meaning between linguistic *modalities* (visual-gestural and oral-aural) as well as languages. SLs have undoubtedly occupied the position of minority languages (in socio-economic and geopolitical terms): BSL was not recognized as a language even by linguists until the mid-1970s (Brennan 1975), and no governmental acknowledgment of this status was forthcoming until 2003 (Turner 2003). Issues of relative power and status – of the interpreters and of their clients, expressed through their languages – have therefore been prominent in the development of the field. The work of SLIs is most commonly bilateral: but the biological inaccessibility of spoken utterances to deaf people results, as implied above, in a profession staffed almost exclusively by people whose dominant language is spoken, producing a highly imbalanced workforce and an intensity of focus on issues of cultural allegiance (Mindess 2006).

Historical background

Historically, SL interpreting of some description has doubtless existed wherever communication has been mediated between signing and non-signing people. The hearing children of deaf, signing parents, becoming fluent bilinguals through natural language transmission, were most likely to act as interpreters (Preston 1994). This task began to receive formal recognition in the 1960s: the first recorded attempt at institutionalization took place in 1964 with the formation of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf in the USA (Frishberg 1990). In recent decades, SL interpreting has developed as an independent profession in many countries (for details, see www.wasli.org), with increasingly structured and extensive education leading to professional status and practitioner associations providing collective representation and strategic development. BSL/English interpreters have been increasingly prominent in PSI contexts since the early 1980s when two professional associations of SLIs were formed covering Scotland and England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Thus, an independent occupation arose, marking its distinction from its historical antecedents within the community (social work, teaching, the clergy) by the development of codes of professional practice and ethics.

As reflected in the presentation of such codes, the role of the BSL/English interpreter has, for over 20 years, been construed in terms that recognize the ‘visibility’ of interpreting within the communication process. The natural disparities between modalities and languages, and the non-linear, multilayered structure of naturally occurring dialogue require practitioners actively to reach decisions about how to convey meanings and maximize communicative equivalence (Roy 2000). Nevertheless, although the normative image of the SLI within the profession may acknowledge the co-participant status of the interpreter (Metzger 1999; Harrington and Turner 2001), the strong but misguided expectation of the general public – that interpreters are communicatively neutral, do not change the course of dialogue and make no self-generated contribution to interaction – remains largely in place, making the education of consumers a

continuing priority (Marschark, *et al.* 2005). Practitioners are also expected to deliver consistent provision across a wide range of circumstances: there is little opportunity to be trained in depth for work with the police, for example, or in health care settings. Equally, the SL-using client-group is heterogeneous, and includes growing numbers of users of SLs other than BSL, as well as signers whose output is disordered or atypical for reasons of mental health, education and other aspects of personal life-history. To meet the needs of such clients, ‘relay’ interpreting – in which two practitioners collaborate to transfer source output into the target language using a third language between themselves as a ‘pivot’ – has become more widespread in the last decade, bringing more deaf practitioners into the field (Turner 2007a).

Despite the fact that the existence of SLs per se has simply not been understood until relatively recently, the status of SL interpreting in the UK is now, in key respects, significantly more secure than that of other PSI provision. Two factors lie behind this situation. First, deaf populations are largely stable and demand for services is correspondingly constant, with fewer than 1,000 registered practitioners UK-wide working frequently with a relatively small number (well under 100,000) of minority language clients and therefore developing a certain mutuality of purpose and greater occupational cohesion. Second, deaf people are identified within public policy as disabled persons, and their right to interpreting services is seen to arise from the nature of their disability. In contrast, members of other Indigenous language minorities seem – reasonably or otherwise – to have been expected to use English and therefore manage with unmediated communication: for them, PSI has historically been seen as a temporary measure, an ad hoc response requiring only *ad hoc* social arrangements.

BSL and PSI

The provision of professional interpreting services inevitably comes at a price and one that has, historically, been beyond the means of the individual service user in the UK. In the case of BSL users, the challenges thrown up by being deaf in a world where most are hearing have, across the years, largely been seen as matters for the individual or the deaf community to address (Ladd 2003). As deaf people could not afford to pay professional wages, interpreting was a matter of voluntary effort, often made by hearing family or church members. Since 1945, however, the state has increasingly accepted responsibility to ensure that people recognized as disabled are supported by the public purse in accessing civic society and enacting their citizenship. Initially, this responsibility was devolved to specialist welfare officers and then to social workers as part of their wider remit. Such arrangements came to be seen as inappropriate, as the interventionist aspects of the social work role were perceived to conflict with the defined neutrality of the interpreter (Scott Gibson 1991; Harrington 2000a), and the result has been the emergence of independent, professional interpreting services, funded largely by the state and made available in public service contexts – including education, health care, legal settings and the workplace – at taxpayers’ expense.

Education

Although the issue of multilingualism in the classroom has become increasingly pressing in the UK in the course of the last decade – with the percentage of primary school pupils whose first language is known or believed to be other than English reported to be 15.2 per cent and rising at almost 1 per cent per annum (DCSF 2009) – access to education always has been and remains a problem for deaf people. Although signing deaf children have been schooled for much longer, it was not until the *Lewis Report* (DES 1968) that any formal concession was made to the use of

manual communication in their education. The influential *Warnock Report* (DES 1978) paved the way for specialist support, which acknowledged the linguistic difference between deaf and hearing children, recasting deaf education as the complex communicative context which is widely recognized today (Swanwick and Gregory 2007).

As it is not a requirement anywhere in the UK that teachers of deaf people can use BSL fluently, the law requires ‘adjustment’ to occur in order to take into account the learning needs of the individual. In the case of deaf children, provision may be made in the shape of a classroom assistant: although such assistants are rarely qualified as SLIs, their wide-ranging role may include interpretation between pupil and teacher. This pattern of educational experience – indirect communication with the primary educator mediated by a ‘communication facilitator’ who is most unlikely to be fully equipped with the skills for the job – is now commonplace for many deaf people of all ages across the developed world (Marschark and Spencer 2003; Monaghan *et al.* 2003). It is reported that ‘more interpreters work in education than in any other specialized setting’ (Janzen 2005: 16). All too frequently, such ‘adjustments’ are made with good intentions but inadequate resources and the quality of the educational outcome for the learner is not investigated (Winston 2004). As a setting for public service interpreting, the classroom can be seen as a high-stakes and highly demanding context. As the majority of learners have traditionally been expected to align themselves with a monolingual education system, however, it has only recently been more widely appreciated that greater support of classroom-based BSL/English interpreting is required if the approach is to succeed (Harrington 2000b).

Health care

As a site of potentially critical interaction, the health care interface is one of the most significant public service contexts for BSL/English interpreters. It is also, however, one of the sites least accessible to research (particularly where this would require video-recording, as much SL research inevitably does), owing to the sensitivity of the situation and the closely guarded confidentiality of the doctor–patient relationship. Nevertheless, it is clear nationally and internationally that deaf people report fear, mistrust and frustration as typical characteristics of health care encounters (Kyle *et al.* 2004; Steinberg *et al.* 2006). In terms of service provision, the key issue for SL interpreting in hospitals is clear: how to ensure that, for a relatively small population of consumers, there will be effective communication services regardless of place and time. The response to this challenge has, since the first such service in the UK was launched in 2006 (Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS), increasingly been to turn to digital technologies to provide remote interpreting services via a video-link. As yet, the efficacy of such services has not been robustly established, and significant questions have been raised (Wilson 2007) about the quality of provision arising from remote delivery.

The role of the interpreter in health interactions is an intense one. Whereas other public service dialogue often takes place in multiparticipant situations – classrooms, courtrooms, committee meetings – doctor–patient dialogue is up close and personal in the extreme. This has led to considerable general exploration of the optimal approach for the interpreter to adopt in these situations (Davidson 1998; Metzger 1999; Angelelli 2004): as an advocate for the patient’s interests when addressing an institutionally empowered gatekeeper, as a co-diagnostician, jointly managing the encounter with the health practitioner, as a strictly non-aligned conduit who takes no responsibility for brokering in instances of communication breakdown, and so on. Functioning as public servants, SLIs may be conscious of an obligation to the institution paying their wages, which can lead to a sense of responsibility ‘to work with the

provider to jointly manage the communication process to ensure that both our expectations mesh (which might suggest being more a part of the healthcare team' (Mapson and Schofield 2010: 11). This balance will remain delicate.

Legal settings

A glance at any daily newspaper in the UK reminds the reader of the extensive public awareness of prominent legal cases, and it is no surprise in this context to find attention also turning to cases where multilingualism is a feature of the proceedings. A significant catalyst for changes in the approach to these issues was the Nuffield Interpreter Project (Nuffield Interpreter Project 1993), which reviewed practices and offered recommendations for tightening up the system. At the time, one survey found that there was no universally accepted formal process for checking any aspect of a court interpreter's competence and that no more than half of courts using interpreters took steps to ensure such competence (Butler and Noaks 1992). Very little attention had been paid to deaf participants involved in legal cases prior to the *Access to Justice for Deaf People in the Bilingual, Bimodal Courtroom* study (Brennan and Brown 1997), which centred on ethnographic analysis of recorded trials in Scottish courtrooms and cast new light on the experiences of BSL users and the interpreters working with them in these public service contexts, making 45 recommendations for principles and practices to address the reported shortcomings.

Even if time were allowed for the BSL/English interpreter to consider at length the interpretation of each utterance in legal interaction, there would remain inherent dilemmas in working between two language systems and additional problems – especially salient in legal contexts (Brennan 1999) – in juggling two quite different modalities (visual-gestural and oral-aural). The dynamics of the interaction – the flow of turn-taking, the cut and thrust of cross-questioning, and so forth – are inevitably affected by the interpreting process (Turner and Brown 2000). Nevertheless, few if any members of such proceedings are aware of the linguistic and interactional challenges that must be faced, all of which are frequently exacerbated by the participating authorities' inappropriate attitudes to deafness and fundamental misunderstandings of the nature of signed language (Reed *et al.* 2000). All of these issues are intensified when the nature of the proceedings relates to immigration or to deaf refugees and asylum seekers: although interpreting studies in general has begun to address matters of political migration and multilingualism (e.g. Inghilleri 2005), and legal practitioners have started to raise concerns about the ill-prepared response when deaf people arrive in the UK from overseas (see, for example, Deaf Blawg 2005) very little attention has, as yet, been paid to the highly complex character of such cross-linguistic signed interaction.

Workplace

Multilingualism in the workplace is a feature of the modern economy. Deaf people have become more visible in the workplace since the industrialization of employment, when they moved from agriculture into manufacturing trades where they were often seen as good workers 'undistracted by sound' (Kyle and Pullen 1988: 51). In situations where there is little or no understanding of deaf culture or accommodation of communication differences, the potential for conflict and misunderstanding is immense. Harris and Bamford (2001) report lack of awareness and flexibility in employers regarding expectations for deaf workers; employee reluctance to seek workplace support; inaccessible application procedures for requesting support; problems with knowledge about and the provision of work-related equipment; and an overall sense that provision remains service-led rather than needs-led. Deaf people thus find their work practices

constrained by norms designed for or evolved in hearing workplaces: informal knowledge within the workplace is particularly hard to access (Trowler and Turner 2002). Hearing staff feel that they are expected to make considerable adjustments to their communicative behaviour (Young *et al.* 2000): it is easy to see how the communication needs of deaf employees can be seen as a low priority.

The impact of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and changing attitudes to disability mean that the modern workplace is more accessible to disabled people (Goldstone 2002) and that ensuring fair access to work is regarded as a public duty. In Britain, the Government-funded Access to Work scheme currently enables deaf and disabled people to apply for support in the form of technical or human resources, and most profoundly deaf applicants are allocated funding to pay for interpreting provision at work. Employed on both a staff and freelance basis, BSL/English interpreters can be contracted to support deaf people in a wide variety of settings, ranging from offices, social services and schools to factory floors. They can interpret across a wide spectrum of interactions – team meetings, formal and informal discussions, training events, supervisions, everyday social workplace interaction and formal events such as professional conferences (Turner 2007b). Nevertheless, Dickinson and Turner (2008) report that practitioners' experiences are routinely of interlingual tension as they seek to make the impossible – perfect multilingual harmony – possible. With interpreters frequently expected to switch between confidant, co-worker, interpreter, assistant and advocate within a single interpreted interaction, it is no wonder that confusion and inconsistency are widely reported along with a sense of guilt, anxiety and frustration.

PSI in Scotland: a case study of spoken and signed language provision

Scotland is a multilingual country with a monolingual bias where the main language is a dominant world language, namely English. Nevertheless, Scotland (population marginally above five million) has a number of Indigenous languages: two heritage spoken languages – Gaelic (the country's second official language since the introduction of the Gaelic Language Act 2005) and Scots – plus the language of the Scottish Deaf Community, BSL. There are also a number of long-established minority language communities: primarily speakers of Bengali, Chinese (Cantonese), Punjabi and Urdu, but also Italian and Polish. Since the late 1990s, the number of languages spoken by individuals or communities who have come to reside in Scotland exceeds 150 (O'Rourke and Castillo 2009: 36). Moreover, as the country identifies tourism as one of its leading industries, and welcomes international visitors for business or educational purposes, any of the world's languages is liable to be spoken on Scottish soil. The Scottish context highlights the challenges of how to respond to societal multilingualism in the face of a varied and shifting pattern of demand for interpreting in the public sector; how to ensure quality of provision where there is no critical mass in demand (for example, in rural areas or where demand is concentrated across a very wide spectrum of languages and dialects); how to cope with changing trends in demand (for example, as geopolitical circumstances bring users of new languages to the country, or as the need for support in certain languages or dialects shifts when social groups relocate).

Legislative and policy framework

The Scottish Parliament (re-established under political devolution in 1998) focused on placing the mainstreaming of social inclusion at the core of its policies and required those delivering services to the public to embed an equality perspective into their work, including equality of access to information and services. Coupled with legislation, this acted as a motivational force

driving forward interest in language issues. In 2000–1, the Scottish Executive established two consultative committees, the Translating, Interpreting and Communication Support Group and the BSL and Linguistic Access Working Group. These groups commissioned a number of pieces of research focusing on translation, interpreting and communication support in the public sector in Scotland, including a literature review (McPake *et al.* 2002) and a study specific to BSL (Kyle *et al.* 2004). In addition, an extensive review (Perez and Wilson 2006a, 2006b) of PSI provision was undertaken. Although this study focused on Scotland, many findings have resonance for other locations.

During the same time frame, organizations at grass-roots level were striving to drive forward improvements in interpreting provision. These included groups representing both the users (e.g. Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters 2002, Scottish Refugee Integration Forum 2003, Scottish Consumer Council 2005) and the providers of interpreting services (the Scottish Translation, Interpreting and Communication Forum 2004). In addition, the Happy to Translate scheme (Equality Scotland) was launched in 2005 (with government support) to indicate the availability of translation/interpreting support within an organization and monitor the quality of support provided.

The combination of action at governmental and grass-roots levels helped to create a climate of cooperation among interested parties: everyone has a right to information and interpreting provision should therefore be built into systems from the start (O'Rourke and Castillo 2009: 48) and provided by public bodies without cost to the individual. Moreover, Perez and Wilson (2006a: 149) found that, although bodies have a budget for interpreting, none would refuse interpreting support even when this budget was spent. Commitment is crucial: the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, for example, has underlined that translation services are a fact of life in modern policing and that, from their point of view, this is money well spent (Gray 2006). Legislation remains a key motivating factor, and indeed many interpreting agencies in Scotland were established in parallel with the introduction of legislation in the 1990s (Perez and Wilson 2006a: 37).

Positive developments in the PSI domain

A number of positive developments have been observed in Scotland's progress towards the use of interpreting as a resource for managing multilingualism. In particular, within the course of a generation, we have seen growing awareness on the part of public sector bodies of the need for *professional* interpreting provision. Public sector bodies have rank-ordered four types of interpreting (Perez and Wilson 2006a, 2006b): face-to-face provision by professional interpreters is the preferred option, followed by telephone interpreting, provision by an in-house public service staff member (not trained as an interpreter) or *ad hoc* interpreting by a family member, friend or member of the local community. The research also significantly showed that some respondents were aware that the interpreting service is not only required for the non-English-language speaker, but that they, as public sector staff, also require professional interpreting support to ensure that they can do their job properly (Perez and Wilson 2006a: 165). Since 2004, further action has also been taken in some sectors to address earlier criticisms, such as the failure of institutional policy makers to ensure that staff understand the organization's policies and procedures regarding interpreting provision, and the lack of joined-up thinking within sectors (e.g. failure to pass information 'downstream' from the family doctor to the hospital).

In the criminal justice sector, to take a specific example, very positive steps have been taken following allegations of institutional racism made in connection with the handling of the case investigating the murder of Surjit Singh Chhokar in 1998 (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of

Constabulary for Scotland 2000; Jandoo 2001). For example, in 2002, guidelines were published by the Lord Advocate (chief law officer in Scotland) for the information of the Chief Constables of the Scottish police forces, which contained recommendations relating to interpreting provision, including for the families of victims (The Lord Advocate 2002). Extensive internal guidelines have been supplied to staff in the court system since March 2003 (Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service 2003). Interpreting guidelines for all levels within the criminal justice system have been publicly available since 2008 (The Working Group on Translation and Interpreting 2008). Some effort has also been concentrated on training provision; for example, a series of courses on working with interpreters, offered regularly throughout the year, has been provided to police officers. In addition, the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service/ Scottish Court Service and the police contribute to training developments, organizing simulated trials in courtrooms for training purposes.

Challenges in the PSI sector

Despite clear progress, weaknesses still exist. For example, cases have collapsed due to the quality of interpreting (see Howie 2007a, 2007b, 2009; McLaughlin 2009). As a general rule, there is a disparity in the availability of competent, trained interpreters across Scotland. There are shortages in certain languages, in certain regions and in certain settings. There are several reasons for these shortages, fundamentally the lack of specific training in certain languages and the lack of funding to support the provision of such training. Moreover, the general working conditions, low status and lack of career path do not attract potential interpreters into the profession. Spoken language interpreters, in particular, are paid very poorly considering the rigorous standards expected of them and are unlikely to be able to make a living from interpreting. Therefore, this work may be carried out as an 'extra' activity supplementing their main job, which further reduces their availability.

The move towards the procurement of interpreting provision by awarding contracts to commercial agencies may also have a negative effect. Although this strategy allows public sector bodies to devolve responsibility for provision and quality, interpreters may find that their income falls and that they may be subject to inappropriate pressures. Indeed, some public sector informants express concern about the possibility of being 'held to ransom', especially if a monopoly situation emerged (Perez and Wilson 2006a: 213). Currently, there is no body functioning as impartial ombudsman for any concerns relating to interpreting. Quality control remains a concern, not only regarding interpreters' qualifications and skills and the monitoring of their performance while working, but also regarding issues such as whether interpreters have been cleared by police checks. Once again, the verification of such issues tends to be devolved to agencies. However, no national system exists for registering or monitoring agencies. Furthermore, there is no central collation of information concerning the demand for and supply of particular services, nor any accurate data regarding unmet demand. The picture regarding the demand for interpreting may be further blurred by the fact that a number of potential users are still not fully aware of their right to support. Systematic and complete collection of data centrally is seen as key to informing policy and planning (Perez and Wilson 2006b), and should extend to capturing information regarding the full spectrum of communication preferences.

Managing multilingualism

Overall, the situation in Scotland seems to illustrate the observations made about the field of interpreting worldwide (see Pöchhacker 2004: 195–204). For example, a growth in the use and

availability of telephone interpreting has been noted: whereas the 2004 research found that only companies based outside Scotland provided telephone interpreting services, in 2009 local agencies are providing such support. Other forms of remote interpreting using videophones or videoconferencing are also emerging (especially for BSL). The example of the SL interpreting profession in Scotland has been highlighted (Perez and Wilson 2006a: 234) as a model of good practice (possessing a Scottish professional body with a recognized register of interpreters, encouraging Continuing Professional Development (CPD), creating a system for the monitoring of registered members, promoting a recommended pay scale). The overarching recommendation that has emerged from stakeholders is for a single, Scotland-wide body, which could act as a unified resource for information and data collection regarding all languages and interpreting services – and possibly as a registration or accreditation body (Perez and Wilson 2009: 25) – thus creating a more coherent framework. The existing arrangements show that the need to respond proactively to the increasing multilingualism of the polity has been recognized, but that the management of such organic responses needs to be structured to maximize efficiency and effectiveness.

Priorities for further development

The last years have seen a shifting of the landscape of the interpreting world at local and international levels. This is manifest in the convergence of the fields of conference interpreting, PSI and SL interpreting. Whereas previously the boundaries delimiting these fields were distinct and the focus was often on defining activities to underline differences, now the boundaries are blurred or have completely vanished. Increasingly, the focus recognizes the overarching similarities. A first shift led to the blurring of boundaries between signed and spoken languages in PSI. A more recent shift is seeing boundaries blurring between PSI and conference interpreting. This is evident in the interest in PSI on the part of professional bodies representing conference interpreters and conference interpreting practitioners, trainers and researchers. These shifts have, no doubt, emerged from increased mutual awareness and understanding, but are also driven by economic and market forces. Consequently, at and around the junction between BSL, spoken language interpreting and PSI, a number of priorities for future development are emerging in relation to policy, research and theory, and training.

Policy

The overriding priority in the area of policy remains the ongoing professionalization of the interpreting world. It is essential to defend the professional status of interpreters working in the public sector. On the one hand, this means giving due recognition to the specific skills required of interpreters working in this sector (i.e. that PSI is not a lower or less demanding type of work). On the other hand, there are issues to be addressed regarding the professional framework: for example, remuneration and working conditions; establishing professional bodies; career structure and training needs; implementing standards; creating mechanisms for quality control and monitoring (with an independent ombudsman to handle complaints or questions of ethics).

Professionalization implies recognition of the role of the interpreter as a fellow professional and awareness of the cost-effectiveness of quality interpreting. But it is also vital to highlight the role and impact of the public service professionals as members of the interpreting triad on the successful outcome of the interpreter-mediated communicative event and their need for training. This should lead to the embedding or mainstreaming of appropriate, quality interpreting

support within the public services. Quality support may require new solutions to be considered to respond to gaps in provision, to improve the overall quality of service provision or to cope with new challenges (e.g. ecological and fiscal constraints). These new solutions may include variations in working patterns, taking advantage of globalization and the use of new technologies. Indeed, rather than threatening existing provision, technology has the potential to extend and increase the availability of provision – many clients dream of the ‘interpreter in their pocket’ through mobile phone technology.

Research and theory

As the professional level of PSI evolves, research activity and related theories move onto new ground. Initially, when the field was emerging as a profession, thinking was very prescriptive, in order to make the break with untrained interpreting provision. As the field has matured, there is the confidence to return to empirical observation and analysis highlighting good practice and problem areas alike. Research is further facilitated by advances in technology (which make the capture of data less intrusive and the analysis simpler). However, efforts are no longer focused on achieving basic, minimum standards and approaches, but on exploring more complex issues, at deeper levels. Moreover, exploration is increasingly rounded, e.g. approached from the perspective of all of the participants in the interpreting triad, rather than solely from that of the interpreter-practitioners.

This aggregation of perspectives must be a priority for future research activity. As PSI practice is a triadic activity, multifaceted research is needed, involving academics, clients, interpreter-practitioners and other professionals. For example, development of models or theories that only consider the perspective of the interpreter, without taking account of the ‘fit’ with any models or theories developed by the public sector domains, will be incomplete. However, interdisciplinarity also needs to continue to build on already established links with other fields of social science and to extend into less-charted fields for PSI research such as jurisprudence, ethics in the professions, computer and information science, psychology, and so on. Moreover, in this new converged era of interpreting, basic research questions relating to the definition of the profession and impact of the professional activity on society are still to be fully answered.

Training

It is also important that interdisciplinarity should feed into an interlinked approach to training. A basic premise must be that theory and practice are interconnected. The PSI world is a dynamic and evolving one and practitioners cannot be prepared for every working scenario they will encounter in training. Therefore, the PSI world needs to be staffed by reflective practitioners and practice must be grounded in theory and research so that practitioners can make informed decisions in the field. Training needs to offer a balance of these two, which entails positioning education at higher education levels. In training institutions and programmes, there should also be an interlinked approach as regards the worlds of interpreting and translation, for example between modes and styles of interpreting, as well as between languages. In addition, connections rather than divisions should be made between SL and spoken language provision, between majority and minority spoken languages. No activity or language combination should be regarded as superior and each should be prepared to learn from the other. A growing number of institutions offer courses integrating signed and spoken languages and make PSI available to students studying conference interpreting, but there is scope for development. Ultimately, there

may be three main priorities for future training. First, to adopt a holistic, interlinked approach to training: both through involving the three parties in the interpreting triad and also exploiting the overlapping and shared needs between different contexts and languages of interpreting. Second, to embrace the potential of technology as a vehicle for delivering and aiding training, and as a medium through which interpreters must be trained to interpret. Finally, we can further exploit the potential of globalization, working with colleagues across national borders to develop training and resources.

Society, technology, the geopolitical circumstances affecting the migration of people and governmental strategies are in constant flux. Interpreters working in the public sector function in varied, evolving worlds with real people, living real lives. Their working circumstances may therefore not always conform to any ideal model. The challenge is to offer quality training, to an appropriate level, in a flexible manner that can accommodate new language pairs or skills, given the resource constraints. It is essential to integrate all stakeholders into the training process and that this integration is not cosmetic, but rather is handled in an interlinked manner that creates a positive spiral. This relates to both the training of student interpreters and to the training of public sector staff to work with interpreters. As the parties work together, there is the potential for them to learn from each other. Mutual respect as fellow professionals can be established and awareness raised of the role of the public sector professional as part of the solution in the interpreter-mediated event: in short, the interpreter cannot do it alone (Turner 2007c). Such an approach has the potential to facilitate the mutual development of responses to challenging questions (e.g. ethical dilemmas) through negotiation. Effective management of multilingualism is thus made a cooperative issue.

Conclusion

BSL/English interpreting acts as an excellent vehicle for illustrating the nature of the field of interpreting, as it encapsulates all the possible variations and demonstrates how barriers can be broken down. As an interpreting activity, at its most fundamental level, BSL/English interpreting spans not only two distinct languages, but also two different media. Its practitioners demonstrate how conference interpreting and PSI overlap as areas of activity, at both local and international levels. Moreover, it encompasses all modes of interpreting and styles of interpreting and involves both a dominant, majority language and a minority and indigenous language. Its interpreters come both from within the community (growing up bilingual) and outside (learning the language later in life); and they may be employed as salaried staff, subcontracted through voluntary organizations or private agencies or be self-employed as freelancers. As a rule, the field of BSL/English interpreting is better organized and structured than that of interpreters with other language combinations working in the public sector in the UK. There is also less of a differential in status, where BSL is concerned, between public service and conference interpreters than is the case for other spoken language combinations (e.g. PSI training is better structured and often positioned at a higher level, and there are better rates of remuneration defended by professional bodies).

In some ways, this idea of BSL interpreting as an example of good practice is the mirror image of the dynamic between conference interpreting and SL interpreting. When SLs gained recognition as languages, they first turned to conference interpreting between spoken languages to inform their professional development and to establish theoretical models. However, interpreting in the public sector (from the perspective of professionalization, research and development, and training) is now being informed by SL interpreting. These shifting tides of influence between types of interpreting highlight the similarities, rather than the differences

and emphasize the need to advance together in addressing this aspect of the modern multilingual world.

Related topics

Sign language and the politics of deafness; multilingual citizenship and minority languages; language rights; linguistic diversity and education; multilingualism in legal settings; multilingualism in the workplace.

Further reading

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