

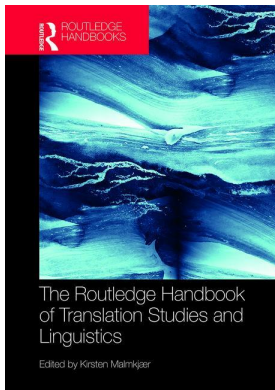
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Sociolinguistics, translation, and interpreting

Federico M. Federici

Introduction

Translating and interpreting are sociolinguistic activities. Language mediations through interpreters and translators happen as part of normative social practices and are dictated by social and language behavioural rules that continuously evolve. Any language mediation occurs in this type of social communicative interaction, whether the agents in the communication are present (interpreting) or meet through the mediation (translation). No other discipline studies the interrelations established between message senders and receivers to create meaning through the interactive social context as closely as sociolinguistics. The same focus on how the factors influencing this interrelation organise meaning represents a priority for any language mediator. From the creation of machine-readable controlled texts to *ad-hoc* interpreting in the aftermath of an avalanche in a mountainous destination for international tourists, few processes are as concerned as translation and interpreting are with register, channel of communication, tenor, field, function of the message, and social relationships between interactants. These tend to be more complex than in cases of monolingual communication, since the sender of the message is typically from a different speech community than the receiver's, although the two may have several similarities in terms of sociolinguistic features that make it possible to achieve the task of mediating between cultures and languages, difficult though it may be.

Translation and interpreting studies (henceforth T&I) are two disciplines with many concerns in common but also several differences in the priority research areas they investigate (Gile, Hansen, and Pokorn 2010). As Gile (2004, 30) puts it, "translation and interpreting share much, both as professional activities and as research activities [making them] natural partners in development". Hence, in this chapter, T&I is used to refer to studies in either discipline that have acknowledged that sociolinguistic methods, concerns, and findings have much to offer to, and much to learn from, studies focused on interpreting and translation acts (Bayley, Cameron, and Lucas 2013b). The chapter maps concepts, ideas, and scholarly work that emphasise the natural relationship between T&I and the study of communication as pursued by sociolinguistics. More than a "natural and fruitful friend to translation studies" (Ramos Pinto 2012, 161), an essential understanding of sociolinguistic concepts is intrinsically

beneficial to professional and trainee translators, whilst also offering counter-arguments to any claims about the untranslatability of dialects, minority, or regional languages (Federici, F. M. 2011).

This overview is divided into four sections. Firstly, it looks at classical and recent definitions of sociolinguistics that enable the conceptual mapping of its relationship with T&I; eliciting the epistemological concerns of the discipline shows their proximity with the discourse on interpreting and translating processes. Secondly, it considers the relationships between interpreting and sociolinguistics and those between translation and sociolinguistics. Thirdly, the notion that the act of communication is genre, context, and text-specific will be discussed in relation to sociolinguistic key terms (such as register and language variety). Finally, this overview suggests that recent, relevant research in T&I, focused on sociolinguistic positions, shows that an understanding of sociolinguistics is likely to become an intrinsic part of the competence of translators and interpreters of the 21st century, as they operate in an ever more technologically competitive context.

Historical perspectives

Independently of the many twists and turns of debates surrounding translation, most researchers and scholars in the field would agree that there is a natural relationship between linguistics, translation, and interpreting (Şerban 2013, 216). Independently of the length, complexity, and level of automation in the creation of the source message, intercultural language mediators and scholars of sociolinguistics share a concern with the concept of the “audience” for communicative acts. They also share the certainty that neither the description of language use in a speech community (sociolinguistics) nor the attempt to render a message from that language into another language in writing (translation) or orally (interpreting) can be discussed through monolithic, prescriptive, and unchangeable concepts. This section elicits the embeddedness of sociolinguistic concepts in acts of translation and interpreting.

Sociolinguistics as a discipline developed through work by linguists in the late 1960s, and is defined as follows by Crystal (2008, 440–441):

sociolinguistics (n.) A branch of linguistics which studies all aspects of the relationship between language and society. Sociolinguists study such matters as the linguistic identity of social groups, social attitudes to language, standard and non-standard forms of language, the patterns and needs of national language use, social varieties and levels of language, the social basis of multilingualism, and so on. [...] In Hallidayan linguistics, the term sociosemantics has a somewhat broader sense, in which the choices available within a grammar are related to communication roles found within the speech situation, as when a particular type of question is perceived in social terms to be a threat. The term overlaps to some degree with ethnolinguistics and anthropological linguistics, reflecting the overlapping interests of the correlative disciplines involved – sociology, ethnology and anthropology. The study of dialects is sometimes seen as a branch of sociolinguistics, and sometimes differentiated from it, under the heading of dialectology, especially when regional dialects are the focus of study.

The definition indicates that where philosophical differences in positioning the relationship of language and society change, they engender a shift in perspective, as happens in several European linguistic traditions (e.g. in France, Italy, Germany, and Spain). Here, the term sociological linguistics is used to emphasise the integration of the study of language within

the broader theoretical framework of sociological theories (drawing on Gramsci's reflections on language, see Boothman 2008). Another definition is found in Hudson (1980/1996, 3; italics in the original): "We can define sociolinguistics as *the study of language in relation to society*". Hudson goes on to discuss sociolinguistics as a dynamic phenomenon. Translating and interpreting are dynamic acts; traditional linguistics predominantly perceived meaning as stable within language systems, whilst Hudson (1980/1996, 10) emphasises that "society consists of individuals, and both sociologists and sociolinguists would agree that it is essential to keep individuals firmly in the centre of interest, and to avoid losing sight of them while talking about large-scale abstractions and movements". The centrality of speakers as actors in the generation of meaning concerns T&I scholars in more ways than one, as shown in work on sociolinguistics and gender (e.g. Federici, E. 2011; Ergün 2010), on social stereotypes in audiovisual translation (e.g. González Vera 2012), on literature (e.g. Sánchez 2007; Klaudy 2007), on journalistic genres (e.g. Marques Santos 2012), on songs (Al-Azzam and Al-Quran 2012) – in fact on any language feature considered by sociolinguists; and work within T&I which adopts sociolinguistic approaches in relation to identity (Cronin 2006; Gerbault 2010), conflict and narratives (Baker 2006; Harding 2013), and discourse (Hatim and Mason 1990, 1997; Munday 2012) developed in parallel with the opening up of new research directions in sociolinguistics (see also Ramos Pinto 2009).

Sociolinguistics is closely connected to T&I because even the most experienced practitioners know that no text is ever identical to a previous or later text. The more stylistically dense the texts, the more language mediators can agree with some of the tenets of sociolinguistics, such as that "we can be sure that *no two speakers have the same language, because no two speakers have the same experience of language*" (Hudson 1980/1996, 11; italics in the original). Among disciplines related to T&I, sociolinguistics is significant because it engages with individual manifestations of language as much as unifying categories that describe language phenomena.

Malmkjær (2011, 60–62) introduces the work of Catford (1965) as one of the first linguists interested in systemic functional grammar to contribute to adopting a systemic functional approach to debates in translation. Catford viewed translation as an event to be studied within applied linguistics. It may similarly be suggested that one of the concepts with the longest-lasting impact in T&I emerged from the London School of Sociolinguistics, initiated by J. R. Firth in the late 1960s, namely that:

speech has a social function, both as a means of communication and also as a way of identifying social groups, and to study speech without reference to the society which uses it is to exclude the possibility of finding social explanations for the structures that are used.
(Hudson 1980/1996, 3)

Halliday's systemic functional linguistics (SFL) with its reflections on the interrelations between registers and functions of utterances in meaning-making stems from the London School, and his sociolinguistics has had the most extensive and consistent influence in T&I (see also the Chapter 1 in this volume). Halliday considers language phenomena part of a sociosemiotic interrelationship that creates meaning. Incorporating semiotics into linguistics, his approach to studying languages radically reconceptualised all the parameters of language systems that enable linguists to study how and why meaning is made within the infinite potential of permutations that allows any language to express concepts in innumerable different ways. This conceptualisation of language enables translators and interpreters to communicate concepts and ideas that are culturally alien to a social group in distant and

unrelated social contexts, expressed by distant and incompatible languages. By combining well-established considerations of languages as systemic entities, Halliday (1994, 16) posits language as a “network of systems, or interrelated sets of options for making meaning”, which is functional both diachronically (any language develops as it is because of what it has evolved to do) and synchronically (any utterance in a language performs a function). Halliday’s definition of language acts as a catalyst in which semiotic approaches and social approaches based on studying language as a multidimensional interaction converge to consider language phenomena as “reflect[ing] the multidimensional nature of human experience and interpersonal relations” (Halliday 2003, 29).

Core issues and topics

According to Nida (1976, 1979, 1993), sociolinguistics offers tools for the interpretation of the communicative act, thus enabling scholars and practitioners to analyse texts as communicative entities. Textual and extra-textual information supports the meaning-making process of any text, and Nida concludes that “only a sociolinguistic approach to translation is ultimately valid” (Nida 1976, 77; see also Pergnier 1978). In the 1970s, Halliday and Hasan’s work on register exerted a strong influence on House (1977, 1997) and had, by the 1980s, become dominant among the concepts of the (then) newly-named discipline of Translation Studies. Snell-Hornby (1988/1995), Hönig and Kußmaul (1982), and Gerzymisch-Arbogast (1986) embedded sociolinguistic reflections on register in their work, which became dominant in the 1990s. After Baker’s (1992) textbook and Bassnett and Lefevere’s edited collection (1990), neither practical nor theoretical discussions in Translation Studies could exclude the sociolinguistic dimension with its emphasis on culture, context, individuality, and other “linguistic” dimensions of translations. The move to an interdisciplinary field of study included a sense of continuum that sociolinguistic perspectives on language and translation facilitated, in place of the 1960s and 1970s debates on the tension between language and culture (discussed in Şerban 2013). Halliday himself engaged with translation (1987) and recognised that sociolinguistic theories would benefit its practice; Yallop (1987) lamented the limited impact of Hallidayan work in translation, and Newmark (1987, 293) affirmed that “Hallidayan linguistics which sees language primarily as a meaning potential should offer itself as a serviceable tool for determining the constituent parts of a source language texts and its network of relations with its translation”. During what was termed the “Cultural Turn” in Translation Studies, new emphasis on the interrelation between cultures and languages also came from the broader impact of Eco’s semiotics and from cultural studies. Semiotic codes, as language systems were considered by semioticians, related directly to sociocultural behaviours. At the end of the 1990s, Katan (1999, 2004/2014) further underpinned the conceptual shifts, by linking notions emerging from anthropology (Giglioli 1972), anthropological linguistics (Ahearn 2011; Duranti 1997, 2001), and evolutionary linguistics to established sociolinguistic perspectives.

Discussions on register enabled translation and interpreting scholars to draw direct links between “language in use” as described in pragmatics and social practices, anthropology, and ethnography (Hudson 1980/1996, 10–11). The links can be made on the basis of anthropological and cultural concepts such as those of identity, belonging, status, norm, gender, power, positioning, marginality, environment, age, race, and many more aspects of human nature that are characteristics of sociolinguistic studies of language and society (see Trudgill 1992). One of the core features of systemic functional linguistics is its focus on concepts that have become central to current sociolinguistics (be they variationist or otherwise), including Halliday and Hasan’s seminal work on “register”. The term register (initially used by Reid

1956, 32) became the keyword to discuss language variety in relation to social constructs, as changes of register generate variations in language in relation to the characteristics of the user and related to their use, “in the sense that each speaker has a range of varieties and choices between them at different times” (Halliday, McIntosh, and Strevens 1964). The range correlates complex scenarios of choice of meaning depending on the function and social context of the communication, “If different types speak differently we can use our own speech to signal this choice. In other words, at each utterance our speech can be seen as an act of identity in a multidimensional space (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985)” (Hudson 1980/1996, 12). Individuals’ linguistic choices depend on the complexity of social relations. Hence, the relationship between meaning and context becomes central, and undeniably a conceptual tool for any translator or interpreter. Halliday and Hasan (1976, 22) understand register to be “the linguistic features which are typically associated with a configuration of situational features – with particular values of the field, mode and tenor”, and House (1997, 2015, 64–65) discusses the relevance of these notions to achieving quality in translation. The three values of field, mode, and tenor are determining factors for significant linguistic features of the text: “The register is the set of meanings, the configuration of semantic patterns, that are typically drawn upon under the specified conditions, along with the words and structures that are used in the realization of these meanings” (Halliday and Hasan 1976, 23).

“Register” is a term that indicates specific values for words in relation to a speech community and a purpose. The concept is so significant and useful from a practical point of view that it has become integrated in a (market-driven) standard, the ISO Standard 12620:2009 (originally of 1999 and revised in 2009) on the Data Category Registry. The standard categorises a number of registers (bench level, dialect, facetious, formal, in-house, ironic, neutral, slang, taboo, technical, vulgar) in the Hallidayan sense. These categorisations, which emerge from descriptive studies of the fluid dynamics of meaning-making found in any language in use, become “standardised” codes to support translation technologies, computational linguistics, and natural language processing (see Bononno 2000). The applicability of register as a sociolinguistic concept to the most applied areas of T&I professional supports (terminology) is evidence of the recognisability of specific speech communities as receivers and senders of messages controlling and controlled by their own “sociolects” and varieties of the language. These are varieties of specialist language as much as sociolects of specific geographical areas (dialectal groupings) are, but most importantly are recognisable features of specialist language that translators and interpreters cannot ignore when working for the speech community that uses that language.

Halliday’s (1990) analysis of two paragraphs of Darwin’s *The Origin of the Species* (1859) suggests a system that allows translators and interpreters to discuss registers in relation to all textual genres. Through the definition of “register”, Halliday explains translatability and untranslatability in simple terms: “we can translate different registers into a foreign language. We cannot translate different dialects: we can only mimic dialect variation” (Halliday 1990, 169). Here, Halliday distinguishes between register and dialect in the following terms: registers are “ways of saying different things” (*ibid.*) whereas “prototypically, dialects differ in expression; our notion of them is that they are ‘different ways of saying the same thing’” (Halliday 1990, 168). Register is a flexible yet complex system, central to language, and a powerful tool that enables practitioners and theorists to compare completely different texts, from oral interactions to written forms of regional varieties.

One variety for which the study of its registers seems to be particularly useful for translation and interpreting is the broader concept of the term sociolect, “used by some sociolinguists to refer to a linguistic variety (or lect) defined on social (as opposed to regional) grounds,

e.g. correlating with a particular social class or occupational group” (Crystal 2008, 440). This definition is comprehensive and can be used to criticise a literary or creative translation as, often, recognisable characters “exist” in the world outside the pages; it arguably works for some areas of oral interactions as well (legalese, court language, bureaucratese, police interpreting, and so on). The references within this definition to social components, social classes, and social status allow us to recognise a variety of speakers of a community (from mathematicians and scientists, to workers, to politicians). Their *lect* is a variety of discourse and language as well, with syntax and vocabulary shared by the group but not necessarily by non-members or all of the members of the group. Translators and interpreters operate on these very features to render a source text for a similar speech group in the target language.

In Hudson’s (1980/1996) definitions of sociolinguistics, the relationship between the individual speaker (and her unique use of the language) and the speech community (and their recognisable set of shared features of register as a community of individuals) speak to interpreters and translators, who often deal with unique voices – however poor, good, authoritative, prescriptive, loose – in the source texts. In this perspective, an idiolect can be considered as the ensemble of linguistic features belonging to a person which is affected by geographical, educational, and even physical factors including class, gender, race, and historical influences that contribute to shaping one’s ideological persona. This category is therefore relevant beyond stylistics, as illustrated in Wales’s definition (2001, 197):

The usage of an individual may well be constrained by his or her place of origin, but idiolect covers those features which vary from register to register, medium to medium, in daily language use; as well as the more permanent features that arise from personal idiosyncrasies, such as lisping, monotone delivery, favourite exclamations, etc. Idiolect thus becomes the equivalent of a finger-print: each of us is unique in our language habits. Such “voice-prints” are of great value to dramatists or novelists as a ready means of characterization, along with physical attributes.

These definitions blur and overlap, confirming “that society is structured, from a socio-linguistic point of view, in terms of a multi-dimensional space” (Hudson 1980/1996, 11). This space could be physical, involving globalised languages, or virtual as in the case of speech communities that operate on the incorporeal dimension of the internet.

In terms of translational activity, Hatim and Mason’s (1990, 44) views on the definition of idiolect are interesting. They cite O’Donnell and Todd’s definition of idiolect (1980, 62) that distinguishes between dialect and style: “‘dialect’, as the kind of variety which is found between idiolects, and ‘style’ as the kind of variety found within idiolects”. Be they dialectal or stylistic, ephemeral, oral, or written down, these are challenges that are shared by interpreters and translators. The blurring of sociolinguistic definitions reflects the complexity of sociolinguistic research and of language as human interaction. For translators and interpreters, either consciously or unconsciously, the more abstract conceptualisations may not necessarily matter, but the sociolinguistic features of any act of communication contribute significantly to the creation of a message for a specific audience and initiate the offer of communication. The “varieties” of a codified grammar and syntax that we can know inside-out can yet throw at us unexpected constructions and formulae that make rendering their meaning a challenge. Trainee language mediators for translation and interpreting professions in the 21st century need to understand the complexity of language acts that presupposes relationships between meaning and speakers, relationships between speech communities and institutional or linguistic powers, relationships between correctness and idiomaticity, and

relationships between gender, education, age, cultural beliefs, religious beliefs, sociocultural norms, and meaning-making.

Newmark (1988, 206) explains the importance of sociolectal features as follows:

On the whole the quirks and sports of idiolect are normalised by the translator: in particular, rather exaggerated or exuberant metaphors and extravagant descriptive adjectives. [...] In some cases, it is not easy to distinguish between poor writing and idiolect [...] but the translator does not have to make the distinction, and merely normalises.

Although this point on the sociolinguistic rendering of idiolectal features may be valid for translators, the same context necessitates different reactions from interpreters, because in speech situations idiolectal features signify specific emotional states (in medical interpreting for instance) or deferential interactions (in police interrogations or legal interpreting). The two main macro-strategies, or norms in Toury's sense (1995/2012), may well be a standardisation or neutralisation, reducing the relevance and significance of the idiolect features, or a creative impetus to solve the impasse in entirely different ways; but many varieties of the language in use do not allow interpreters or translators to simply deploy them without jeopardising the quantity (let alone quality) of the information to be conveyed.

Current debates

The relationship between interlingual mediations, be they translation or interpreting acts, and sociolinguistics is undeniably close. Communicative acts happen in the language in use in a society, independently of the size of this “society” – be it made up of thousands or of a few members. This immediacy became the focus of much research in interpreting in the early 1980s, and was consolidated in work by Cecilia Wadensjö. Her work was influenced by interactional linguistics, a discipline which gradually came to affect the whole spectrum of research conducted in Interpreting Studies, from consecutive interpreting to liaison and dialogue interpreting in the community. Due to the immediate contextualisation of interpreting within an interactional speech act, the text mutates as part of the mediation in dialogue interpreting as well as in forms of conference interpreting where source speakers work on the basis of a prepared speech, but do not strictly speaking read it out. A speech community can include just one speaker per language plus the interpreter, in the interpreting triangle of dialogue interpreting; hence, the pertinence of sociolinguistics to debates in interpreting studies was recognised early in the life of sociolinguistics as a discipline. The predominant difference compared to Translation Studies is that the significance of sociolinguistics for interpreting studies is also acknowledged in works aimed at audiences interested in sociolinguistics, such as *The Oxford Handbook of Sociolinguistics*. The entry on interpreting in that handbook focuses far more clearly on the relationship between the disciplines than the entry on translation (Grin 2013), which focuses on relationships between issues in translation and issues in language policy and language contact, an ancillary position compared to the “equal” positioning of interpreting and sociolinguistics.

In Interpreting Studies, especially in texts for training (Allioni 1989), but also in the wider domain of community and dialogue interpreting, the relationship with sociolinguistics appeared entirely natural. It is worth noting that sociolinguistics is overwhelmingly monolingual, although Bayley, Cameron and Lucas (2013a, 1), editors of the *Oxford Handbook of Sociolinguistics*, note the need to consider “sociolinguistics as an interdisciplinary exercise,

emphasizing new methodological developments, particularly the convergence of linguistic anthropology and variationist sociolinguistics”, whilst also editorially challenging their discipline’s status quo by inviting “contributors [who] have worked in a range of languages and address sociolinguistic issues in bi- and multilingual contexts” (*ibid.*). The issue of comparing translations to use their textual differences as “evidence” for sociolinguistic studies has been noted before (see Şerban 2013), and it is promising that the mutual relevance of research questions and concerns within closely related disciplines such as T&I studies and sociolinguistics has finally been perceived.

In their discussion of sign interpreting as a sociolinguistic activity, pioneers of the field of applying sociolinguistics to interpreting Metzger and Roy (2013, 736) emphasise that a number of years separate the growth of sociolinguistics in the 1960s and 1970s and pioneering research in interpreting. Sign interpreting was among the first areas to adopt sociolinguistic approaches (Cokely 1985, 1992; Roy 1989; Metzger 1995). Early work in interpreting (Gerver 1969/2002; Goldman-Eisler 1967) considered consecutive interpreting an object of study (Pöchhacker 2010b, 5) as part of research on psycholinguistics, given the cognitive load imposed by the task on the interpreters. For Pöchhacker, a more sociological approach was ushered in with the first research in medical interpreting (Cicourel 1981) by sociologists engaged with the social aspects of interaction rather than its linguistic impact. He observes that:

only in relatively recent times, interpreting scholars have come to stake out their claim on the scientific landscape for the study of interpreting. By doing so, they are addressing a basic human (epistemological) need, taking charge of a phenomenon at the intersection of language, cognition, interaction and culture that is socially relevant and therefore clearly worth studying.

(2010b, 7)

The delay may reflect a definition of interaction that was much more dominant in early studies of sign language interpreting, possibly a branch of interpreting that was less integrated in the spectrum from conference to dialogue interpreting until recently. For Metzger and Roy (2013, 76) the link between interpreting and sociolinguistics is self-evident: “Each interpreted interaction undertaken by a professional interpreter is situated within the sociolinguistic context of a relevant aspect of interpretation as a profession, but also the larger sociolinguistic context in which interpreters work” (2013, 376). It seems that this perspective reached interpreting researchers from a Translation Studies background, illustrating what Pöchhacker (2010a, 153) refers to as the “dual conceptual status of interpreting”, as a discipline “at once subsumed under the broader notion of translation and set apart by its unique features”. Mason’s work on pragmatics, which was also significant in extending the notion of discourse in translation, extended to research in interpreting: Mason and Stewart (2001) posit a link between interactional linguistics and interpreting. Though Hallidayan ideas permeate many works in interpreting from the 1990s (Gile 1991; Shlesinger 1994, 1995), it is arguably in the areas of dialogue interpreting (Berk-Seligson 1990/2002) and especially in sign language interpreting that the sociolinguistic approach first flourished and produced a range of applicable findings. This context is considered by Metzger and Roy (2013, 376) as part of a reciprocity of focus between sociolinguistics and interpreting studies:

Each interpreted interaction undertaken by a professional interpreter is situated within communities that harbor their own unique multilingual, bilingual, and language contact phenomenon; within a setting that represents a snapshot of what may be a long history of

language policies and planning; and in a social environment beset with language attitudes about one or both of the languages involved.

From the perspective introduced above, it seems almost tautological to say that core features of studies in interpreting tally with sociolinguistic approaches to the study of communication in society. Distinctions were drawn between conference interpreting and dialogue interpreting, with the latter emerging as an important area of training and research from the late 20th century, whilst with the Nuremberg trials the visibility of conference interpreters became embedded in high-level institutional, multilingual interactions. This visibility-focused research on the cognitive efforts of performing tasks in simultaneous conference interpreting.

The duality of focus corresponds also to a different relationship with power. Dialogic and typically illustrating an “unequal distribution of knowledge and power” (2010a, 155), for Pöchhacker there is a growing need for community-based interpreting in multicultural societies that strive for inclusivity and access to services for the multicultural and multilingual general public. The spectrum is not fixed but dynamic and interactions vary considerably across a range of contexts (see Pöchhacker 2004; Hale 2007). Positioning conference interpreting at one end of a spectrum of social interactions involved in interpreting and liaison interpreting (diplomatic, military, business settings with whispering as a variant of the simultaneous mode), and “community interpreting” at the other end of the spectrum, it is easy to see the importance of mode, tenor, and field of communication to power relations and domains of operation for interpreters. The fundamental concerns of sociolinguistics, such as changes in message constructions (discourse), are intrinsic in any modality of interpreting. In Wadensjö (1992, 1998), theorising interpreting within interactional sociolinguistics, a portrayal of the community interpreter emerged that shows the natural linkage of interpreting studies with sociolinguistics more clearly than had been the case in earlier work, although around the same time Moser-Mercer (1997) considered interpreting at the crossroads of interdisciplinary research approaches necessary to cognitive psychology. Pöchhacker (2010a, 157) considers this to be a different perspective to Wadensjö’s, although, arguably, both theoretical positions have a focus on behavioural traits intrinsic to the activity of professional interpreters. Within sociolinguistics (and in particular in anthropological linguistics) behaviour traits explain processes of meaning-making as linguistic activities in a social setting independently of their conscious or unconscious psychological nature (see Giglioli 1972).

One similarity between translation, interpreting, and sociolinguistics therefore lies in the dominant descriptivism of the actual, authentic “acts” of interpreting, translation, and communication respectively. They are all focused on the intentional nature of constructing meaning as a dynamic rather than stable concept, from Toury’s (1995/2012) influential drive towards a descriptive Translation Studies, which Gile (2004) considers equally applicable to interpreting studies, to recent redefinitions of the field in House (2014). Translation and interpreting studies are research areas that deal with socially driven and socially contextualised communication environments. They work with the same non-reductionist approach as sociolinguistics, which seeks to describe with comprehensible yet flexible categories vastly complex phenomena of language. For instance, this is the case with the relationship between a “speech community” and their variety of use, underpinned by specific functions and traditionally by some geographical interconnection, which is being reconsidered. Translators and interpreters operate within boundaries that would be considered core in sociolinguistics; it could be argued that a thorough understanding of sociolinguistics should be an intrinsic part of language mediator competence.

One of the theoretical strongholds of sociolinguistics is that this discipline embraces the complexity of realia. Rather than embracing reductionist models or systems, sociolinguists study the endless flows of infinite linguistic permutations connected with real speakers and their linguistic behaviours. It is impossible to generalise or simplify them into stable “structures”. Even in the case of simplified languages as input for machine-translated texts, texts remain individual and dependent on context to create meaning, as well as anchored to a time of production and consumption in the case of literary texts (fiction, poetry, and plays). This distinguishing feature of communication acts applies to oral and written mediators alike. Discussing literature, Hofstadter (2009, 6) offers an emotive depiction of the uniqueness of idiolect when he becomes “aware of just how strange, even paradoxical, it was to use my native language – and, more specifically, my own deeply personal style of crafting, manipulating, and savouring phrases in my native language – to rewrite someone else’s book”. This individuality also relates to the notion of language variety that applies to the macro- as well as the micro level of analysis. Any speaker belongs to a speech community; this is the default position, however because language varieties are coagulations of different registers used by groups of speakers, it is better expressed by saying that any speaker belongs to a number of speech communities. Authentic conversations and interactions, authentic texts, retain the characteristics of belonging to a specialised language of sorts, hence the appropriateness of discussing texts in relation to language varieties. These language varieties share features within speech groups and retain different levels of uniqueness in the individual member of that group, the idiolect. Interpreting and translation attempt transmission of specific varieties to suitable, adequate, specialist, intermediate, and/or “equivalent” speech communities in the target language, which share comparable sociolinguistic features with the source speech community, or that the language mediators involved in the transmission consider as sharing similar features.

Sociolinguistic concepts of register and variety were reconsidered in the early decades of the 21st century in relation to global communication. House (2015, 99) refers to Blommaert’s (2005, 73) concept of “orders of indexicality” as one that should make language mediators who strive for quality renderings in global communicative acts wary of *where* meaning is being created, and ultimately of the very notion of the variety of a “speech community”. A further relevant observation is that these orders of indexical meanings continue to create sociolinguistic connections between linguistic signs and contexts, although such contexts may not necessarily be physical. If they are virtual, the functions of a community of speakers are not interpretable as sociolects of a *geophysical* nature: as “some of the biggest errors (and injustices) may be committed by simply projecting locally valid functions onto the ways of speaking of people who are involved in transnational flows” (Blommaert 2005, 72). From this perspective, House (2015, 99) warns that:

classic sociolinguistic notions like “speech community” can no longer legitimately be held to be true. The focus needs to be on language in motion, with various spatiotemporal frames simultaneously interacting. Increasingly problematic is also the idea of a maintenance of functions: when linguistic items travel across time, space and indexical order, as they always do in translation, in transnational flows, they may well take on different locally valid functions.

Implications for practice

The transnational flow represents the death of concepts such as “lingua-culture” that offered useful points of departure for simplified discussions of culture and language interactions in

translation from one national language into another, thus considering only dialects, minority languages, and regional sociolects as translation problems. Notions such as *lingua-culture* were in fact problematic from the outset (in any sociolinguistic perspective, no national language is entirely monolingual; and where tribal languages can be as remote and isolated as the speech community that uses them, diachronic discourse of language in contact still applies). Nevertheless, it could be argued that distinguishing virtual and global speech communities from local speech communities remains possible: the problematic nature of the global perspective does not invalidate the usability of the notion of speech community. A global speech community may use varieties of languages, such as the well-known international business English or commercial Chinglish; they are spatiotemporally distant from a South Frisian speech community but they can be considered as sociolects of a speech community, regardless of their virtual or global spatiality. Speech communities have become spatially different but not necessarily an obsolete category of thought, especially when such categories are used as analytical tools by language mediators.

Linguistic varieties and diachronic as well as synchronic variations are what make languages potentially able to express, in infinite permutations, infinite amounts of thoughts and feelings. The contrastive use of translations to discuss language behaviour as criticised by Şerban (2013, 215) fails because translation and interpreting are decision-making activities driven by the expectations, social norms, and individual behaviours expressed within the language variety and the idiolects used to create meaning in the target language. These reflect meaning in a similar variety as the one used in the source language, with the fluid imperfections of a crystal-clear surface of water mirroring one's face. The varieties can be very proximately within the linguistic system of departure and very distantly in the linguistic system of arrival; these distances in meaning, though immeasurable, nevertheless present the universal difficulty of translation, which has led to translation being deemed an impossible act from the perspective of prescriptive linguistics but a successful act – excluding concerns of equivalence – within the descriptive perspectives of sociolinguistics.

The main points to be considered are that sociolinguistic concepts should be the bread and butter of any language mediator (as communicative competence, Lung 1998); theoretically they help to organise practical tools (terminology) and to address the most unpredictable aspects of the mediation (pitching to an audience). As a conceptual tool, the sociolinguistic notion of variety covers anything from utterances of a simplistic functional nature in an unrepeatably context to the overall study of a dynamically evolving “standard” language, encompassing all the rules and potential grammatical categories of that system deemed as correct and just. Interpreters and translators do not mediate between language systems (Source Languages and Target Languages written with initial capitals), they mediate between speakers of a multi-layered variety.

The fluidity and complexity of every unique act of communication are unrepeatably, even when the act manifests in the form of a re-readable literary piece. Linguistics as a discipline may in the past have considered translation as a sub-branch, and many current institutional framings of academic and research activities in translation and interpreting continue to prevent the positioning of translation and interpreting as part of a broader disciplinary area of linguistics. However, the debate is irrelevant if we remove notions of disciplinary boundaries and consider the practical realities of translating: a basic understanding of sociolinguistics aids interpreters and translators in understanding the elusive notion of a source audience so as to enable them to consider rendering and reframing, narratives, and forms of transfer of meaning that are acceptable for a target audience.

Additionally, we translate and interpret in and out of dialects, contradicting Halliday's afore-mentioned assumption. By contradicting Halliday, the professional practices of

translators and interpreters show that idiolects, dialects, sociolects, and any form of linguistic variety in an act of communication finds a successful linguistic mediation through the efforts of practitioners. This suggests that the theoretical postulations of connexions between T&I and sociolinguistics could go further, because the practice goes further than the potential cul-de-sacs of some extreme registers and language varieties. Undeniably, the use of professional or non-professional interpreters or translators in many circumstances (e.g. in emergencies, see Moser-Mercer *et al.* 2014; Federici 2016) introduce further “active” varieties influencing the process of rendering any form of communication into different languages with some (admittedly variable) degrees of success, thus ensuring that language mediators attempt to deal with any variety and register.

Latin authors and medieval writings in Latin about vernacular versions of the classics distinguished translation and interpreting as separate practices, one noble and one operational, one hermeneutic and one commercial. This distinction influenced a normative tradition that divided approaches to translating into a simplified yet influential binary opposition of word-for-word and sense-for-sense. The sociolinguist sees an opportunity to describe language mediation processes as a spectrum in which a non-linear progression word-for-word and sense-for-sense exist within the fluctuation of language, in the dynamic of meaning-making, in a continuum and not in isolation. The diversity within and between sociolinguistics, translation, and interpreting is essential to a wide and rich understanding of meaning-making in its many dimensions and interactions; however, a grounding in sociolinguistics equips translators and interpreters with the critical and analytical skills that complement domain specialisms and the technological supports available to them.

Further reading

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- Nida, E. A. 1993. The sociolinguistics of translation. *Sendebær* 4, pp. 19–27. Repositions and reconceptualises Nida’s earlier work within sociolinguistics.
- Ramos Pinto, S. 2012 “Sociolinguistics and Translation.” In *Handbook of Translation Studies*. Vol. 3, edited by Y. Gambier and L. van Doorslaer, 156–162. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. A recent mapping of sociolinguistics and translation which suggests a different and complementary approach to the one offered in this chapter.
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