

Introduction to the Second Edition

Linguistic Coping Strategies:

Fifteen Years Later

In 2002, Douglas McLean published a revised version of my PhD dissertation as *Sign Language Interpreting: Linguistic Coping Strategies*. This text is now widely used in interpreter training programs all over the world. I have received feedback from interpreter educators, practitioners, and students alike telling me how much they value the book; they have even called it a practitioner's "bible."

The book and other publications drawing from the research have been widely cited by researchers in signed language interpreting (e.g., Goswell, 2012; Leeson, 2005; Roy & Metzger, 2014; Stone, 2009; Wang, 2013), and also by researchers in spoken language interpreting (e.g., Bartłomiejczyk, 2006; Pöchhacker, 2004). Metzger (2006, p. 283) states that the study has "significant implications regarding interpreter practice, the training of interpreters, and raise[s] questions for further research." Thus, when Douglas McLean released the rights to the book, I thought it worthwhile to keep it in print. However, since the research is now 15 years old, it is important to contextualize my work with an update of other research conducted since 2001 that may have built upon or complemented this original piece of research.

In studying the linguistic coping strategies sign language interpreters employed during a university lecture in Australia, I focused on four main areas.

1. An analysis of the *translation style* used by the interpreters and the relationship between their familiarity with university discourse and the translation style that they chose (see also Napier, 2002a, 2002c, 2005a);
2. An analysis of the *interpreting omissions* produced with respect to the lexical density of the text and the use of academic English and subject-specific terminology (see also Napier, 2003, 2004);

3. An analysis of the interpreters' reflections on their decision-making strategies (their *metalinguistic awareness*), which informed the types of omissions they produced (see also Napier & Barker, 2004b);
4. An exploration of Deaf university students' perceptions and preferences of interpreters' linguistic choices and use of translation style when interpreting university lectures (see also Napier & Barker, 2004a).

My study was similar to Locker's (1990) research in the United States (US), where she also elicited the perceptions of Deaf college students. But Locker focused on comparing the perceived differences between transliteration and interpretation, terms that were previously defined in the US as being distinct and separate practices (e.g., Livingston, Singer, & Abrahamson, 1994; Siple, 1995, 1996; Sofinski, 2003; Sofinski, Yesback, Gerhold, & Bach-Hansen, 2001; Winston, 1989; Winston & Monikowski, 2003).¹ But these distinct terms are used less in the literature now. Metzger (1995, 1999) had previously discussed notions of free and literal interpretation in her study of interpreters' footing shifts in mediating medical consultations. My study presents the first evidence of how interpreters can blend free and literal translation approaches, how each translation style operates on a continuum, and how interpreters may deliberately move between the different styles.

In building on Newmark's (1987, 1991) discussion of free and literal translation with respect to spoken/written languages, I adopted a functionalist approach to translation and interpreting that draws on systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1985, 1993, 1994), and I suggested that interpreters can have a dominant or extremely dominant translation style. I also borrowed from the sociolinguistic concept of language contact that has been used to discuss the features of sign language when a spoken and a signed language (or two signed languages) come into contact (see Adam, 2012; Lucas & Valli, 1989, 1990). Thus this study complements Davis's examination of how interpreters work in a language contact situation and his discussion of *cross-linguistic strategies* used by interpreters and when they adopt language contact strategies and borrow from

1. In fact the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) in the US previously provided certifications in either Interpretation or Transliteration.

English into American Sign Language as a deliberate interpreting strategy (Davis, 1990a, 1990b 2003, 2005).

Furthermore, I described a form of *translational contact* where interpreters can move between the different translation styles within the same piece of interpretation and make deliberate linguistic choices according to their knowledge and understanding of the *context of situation* (Halliday & Hasan, 1985). Essentially, this means that interpreters make decisions based on who they know is in the audience, their assumptions about the needs of the audience, and the clues they receive from the audience. This aligns with other theoretical frameworks that have been applied in studies of interpreting, such as *audience design* (Mason, 2000) and *relevance theory* (Sperber & Wilson, 1986).² Relevance theory, in particular, has been used as a framework for analyzing spoken/written translation and interpreting (Blakemore & Gallai, 2014; Gutt, 2000) and also sign language interpreting (Stone, 2009), in relation to interpreters' decisions about meeting audience needs.

My original research also opened up a new discussion in the sign language interpreting sector with respect to how omissions may not necessarily be erroneous. When Franz Pöchhacker asked me in 2013 to contribute an entry on *omissions* to the new *Routledge Encyclopedia of Interpreting Studies* (Pöchhacker, 2015), I queried whether someone else who had conducted more recent research might be better placed to write the entry. Pöchhacker responded that my study was still the most advanced work on the subject (Pöchhacker, personal communication, 13 May 2013). So it would appear, that although this study is 15 years old, it is still a reference point for spoken and signed language interpreting research and the consideration of interpreting omissions.

The key to my discussion of omissions is the proposal that interpreters can reflect on, and potentially decide strategically, how and why to omit information. This idea was not necessarily new. Spoken language interpreting researchers had already suggested definitions for omissions that are produced deliberately and strategically as part of an interpreter's cognitive decision-making process. Barik (1975) studied the number and type of omissions in relation to text type and directionality, and he proposed

2. Relevance theory was first developed by Sperber and Wilson with respect to direct communication in the same language.

a taxonomy that distinguished between four types of omissions: *skipping* (of a single lexical item); *comprehension* (omission of a larger unit of meaning, as a result of an inability to comprehend the source language message); *delay* (omission of a larger unit of meaning, due to lagging too far behind the speaker); and *compounding* (conjoining elements from different clauses or sentences). These omissions have also been referred to as *condensing strategies* (Sunnari, 1995), *selective reductions* (Hatim & Mason, 1990), and *compression strategies* (Chernov, 2004). But it was a new idea in sign language interpreting studies.

Cokely (1992a, 1992b) extended Barik's work to sign language interpreter output and only recently have sign language interpreter researchers begun to study directionality (Nicodemus & Emmorey, 2015; Wang & Napier, 2016). Cokely developed a *miscue taxonomy*, in which he defined morphological, lexical, and cohesive omissions as miscue types. He then applied his miscue taxonomy to a study of the effects of lag time on interpreter errors (1992b). He found that lexical omissions were the most prevalent, followed by cohesive omissions and a much smaller number of morphological omissions. The interpreters who had a shorter lag time made more omissions than those with a longer lag time, with over twice as many total miscues.

What was particularly new from my study was the idea that every interpretation contains *omission potential*. I borrowed from Halliday's (1978) term *meaning potential* (which has been discussed by Hatim & Mason [1990] with respect to interpreters) to explain that interpreters can ignore the form of the message and focus entirely on the meaning, that interpreters can explore a range of semantic choices in order to achieve meaning, and that every message has a potentially different meaning depending on the context of the situation. In the same way, I suggested that interpreters can consider the omission potential of any text, in that the omissions produced by interpreters may change depending on the context of the situation, and that interpreting students can be taught specifically to examine the types of conscious omissions they produce and to identify the omission potential of texts (Napier, 2005b).

Whereas all the studies reported here analyze monologic interpretations in one language direction, Wadensjö's (1998) work gives an account of omissions in interpreter-mediated communication in dialogic contexts. While incorporating similar components to those of Barik and Cokely, she uses alternative terminology with more positive connotations. In her

taxonomy, she defines three types of *rendition* that could be considered as omissions: *reduced renditions* (information expressed less explicitly than in the original), *summarized renditions* (text corresponding to two or more prior originals), and *zero renditions* (an original utterance that is not translated). Wadensjö stresses that the interpreter's renditions must be considered within the whole context of the dialogic interaction, as interpreters aim to produce contextually, linguistically, and culturally appropriate utterances that meet the communicative goals of the original speakers.³

More recently, various authors suggest that omissions can be considered from a pragmatic perspective, whereby they are treated as conscious decisions made by the interpreter rather than mistakes resulting from miscomprehension. Bartłomiejczyk (2006) examines strategic omissions in relation to directionality, and Pym (2008) suggests that omissions can be considered low risk or high risk, depending on their potential detrimental impact.

My third focus area was the *metalinguistic awareness* that interpreters have with respect to their interpreting decisions. This topic has been further explored by other sign language interpreter researchers and practitioners (e.g., Lakner & Turner, 2015). During retrospective interviews, I tapped into the metalinguistic awareness of my study participants by asking them to reflect on and self-analyze their interpreting output, translation styles, and production of omissions. The results revealed that the interpreter participants had a high level of metalinguistic awareness about their own work. This approach has also been adopted by other researchers in the form of *think aloud protocols* (Russell & Winston, 2014; Stone, 2009), and educators have acknowledged that it is important for practitioners to engage in *reflection* (Ganz Horwitz, 2014; Goswell, 2012), and *reflective practice* (Dean & Pollard, 2013; Hetherington, 2012).

The final study area examines the perspectives of Deaf university students with respect to the nature of sign language interpreting in university lectures. In my study, four Deaf people participated in a panel (focus group) discussion where they commented on their interpreting preferences after viewing two videotaped segments of university lecture interpretation, one demonstrating a predominantly free approach and the other a predominantly literal approach. I explored the Deaf students'

3. See Major and Napier (2012) for the application of Wadensjö's rendition categories to the analysis of sign language interpreting in healthcare dialogues.

expectations in relation to the educational backgrounds and qualifications of university interpreters; and the students' level of comprehension of interpretations.

I have explored the perspectives of Deaf consumers on interpreters and interpreting in relation to access to healthcare information (Major, Napier, Ferrara, & Johnston, 2012; Napier & Kidd, 2013; Napier, Major, Ferrara, & Johnston, 2014; Napier & Sabolcec, 2014), with respect to video remote interpreting (Napier 2012; Napier & Leneham, 2011; Skinner, Turner, Napier, & Wheatley, submitted for publication), in educational interpreting (Carty, Leigh, Goswell, & Napier, submitted for publication), and in my other research more generally (Napier, 2011; Napier & Rohan, 2007). The perspective of Deaf consumers has been further examined by sign language interpreter researchers in other countries, including Canada (Stratij, 2005), the Netherlands (De Wit & Sluis, 2014), and the United States (Forestal, 2005; Kurz & Langer, 2004).

Aspects of my study have been, or are now being, replicated in sign language interpreting studies by graduate students (e.g., De Wit, 2010; Heyerick, 2014; Kauling, 2015). It is my hope that by keeping this book in print, the study will continue to inform interpreting students, educators, practitioners, and researchers of spoken and signed language interpreting.

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