

The Discipline of Interpreting Studies

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I never teach my pupils, I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn.
—Albert Einstein

Academic disciplines determine how language, culture, ideas, events, objects, and interpreting are studied. All of us reap the benefits of those studies. Most professions require at least a bachelor's degree to demonstrate one's knowledge and expertise of a profession. Academic study rewards us with research-based knowledge so that we make thoughtful, wise, and acceptable decisions about the work we do. We invite you to examine the new, emerging discipline of Interpreting Studies (IS) so you can become a recognized and respected professional.

IN THIS chapter we discuss what constitutes an academic discipline and some of the crucial concepts about a scientific disciplinary field and provide an overview of Interpreting Studies (IS). Readers are likely familiar with the idea of disciplines, as many have taken classes in psychology, English, and mathematics, among others. However, it has been our experience that gaining familiarity with and understanding the design of a discipline are two different objectives. Most students are busy learning content rather than focusing on the elements of a discipline—which is okay. That is why we dedicate both time and space to unpack the design of a discipline before considering IS; then present the disciplines that best represent both the field's past and future. Disciplines that produced studies of interpreting are explained, followed by their theoretical and methodological lenses to illustrate how they have addressed the questions and concerns pertinent to IS.

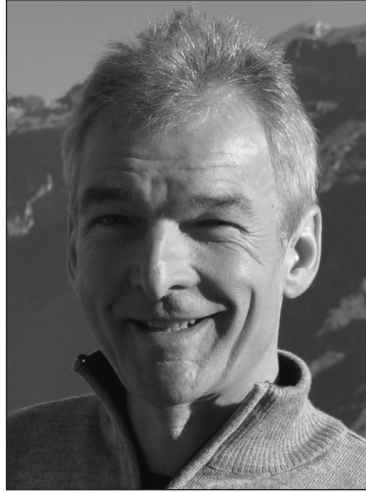
In 2004, Franz Pöchhacker wrote *Introducing Interpreting Studies* (the inspiration for this book). Until the early 1990s, scholars who studied interpreting did so under the umbrella of other disciplines, such as sociology, linguistics, or Deaf Studies. The sister discipline of interpreting, translation, had become known as Translation Studies (TS) and was a large field of study with a long history. While, early research on interpreting was conducted under psychology, it was clear that studies were proliferating using much of the terminology from translation; however, it became apparent that the concerns and questions of interpreting would differ in significant ways from the concerns and questions of translation. For that reason, Pöchhacker (2004) set out “[...] to provide students, research-minded teachers and practitioners of interpreting as well as scholars in related fields with a broad and balanced overview of interpreting studies as an academic field of study” (p. 1). He presented a multilayered map of IS composed of:

1. an overview in terms of concepts, developments, approaches, paradigms and models
2. a look at salient research studies of interpreting from a variety of disciplines
3. a review of major trends and future perspectives of interpreting research.

A second edition was published in 2016 and is a must read for any student engaged in academic studies of interpreting.

In this textbook we provide an in-depth introduction of six major disciplines: history, translation, linguistics, sociology and anthropology, social psychology, and cognitive psychology from which studies in IS have emerged—with specific focus on Sign Language Interpreting Studies (SLIS). Before delving into these chapters, it is important to first discuss what a discipline is along with its key concepts. While people may engage these terms in everyday use, their application within academia is specific and different.

Ideally, what we hope to do as authors of this text and scholars of IS is to move away from the overly simplistic discussions of interpreting to encourage research and theoretical analyses.



Franz Pöchhacker

For example, in the late 1980s, the work of sign language interpreters was conceptualized as metaphors of practice (although, they were erroneously referred to as a models). These metaphors (i.e., helper, conduit, communication facilitator, and bilingual–bicultural) provided a label for one part of interpreting work (Roy, 1993/2002), and focused solely on interactions with consumers. What several of these disciplines will emphasize is that interpreting should also be examined as a *social phenomenon*, an event with people and practitioners all embedded in particular histories and influenced by the societies they all inhabit. These disciplines illustrate that people involved in an interpreted event experience the moment not only physically but also socially, linguistically, and psychologically. Understanding this larger picture undoubtedly informs the work of translators and interpreters.

THE MAKE-UP OF AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

Before we examine IS, it is important to first define what constitutes an academic discipline. Our argument throughout this book is that IS necessarily brings together different disciplines, which individually contribute to the exploration of interpreting as a practice.

Universities were founded to consolidate scientific knowledge about the world and about human behavior. Professors are expected to teach what is known and to research what is not known, but, of course, no one can study everything. After the Renaissance, teachers naturally began to group areas of study together, and called them disciplines, including history, mathematics, science, and literature. Every discipline strives to develop scientific *theories*, either about how the world works or the different ways in which to understand human beings and their actions. Theories provide general principles for how something works or an explanation of the relationships between two or more concepts (Merton, 1967; Schneider, 2006). As Chafetz (1988) said, “the central task of any science and its theories is to aid in our understanding or explanation of some class of empirical phenomena” (p. 5). These *empirical* phenomena are facts or events that are observed and can be verified through approaches that include experiments, observations, interviews, or recordings. Gathering facts, observing and recording events, interviewing people, counting occurrences, and detecting patterns are all different approaches to collecting and analyzing data for research. Analysis then either confirms a theory about how the world works or allows scientists to develop new theories, which, in turn, help explain how persons, places, or events are connected and related to one another.

Research studies are designed to test a theory. This ensures specific *data* (language examples, interpreting examples, survey responses, or responses to experiments) are collected to either test an hypothesis or explore emerging categories and themes, or describe specific phenomena within the data.

Our own research work (indeed, we will be drawing on other scholars throughout this book; however, we agreed to take this opportunity to self-aggrandize) has put forth different, but not contradictory, theories about interpreting. For example, Cynthia Roy’s (2000) position that interpreting is a discourse process, or Jeremy Brunson’s (2011) position that access is a matrix of various apparatuses that organize video relay service (VRS) interpreters’ labor, or Christopher Stone’s (2009) position that Deaf translators adhere to norms that create effective interpretations and translations. These three analytic positions contribute to developing an overall theory of interpreting.

Scientific Methods

Theories are tested through scientific methods, which either demonstrate their strengths or weaknesses, or allow a detection of patterns or systems that add to a theoretical notion. Scientific methods follow specific guidelines (or protocols) to subsequently enable studies to be replicated. The scientific community has divided data collection into two broad categories:

- qualitative methods, which include interviewing, observations, and other ways of collecting data and which aim to explore a particular phenomenon in depth, yield data in the form of notes, transcripts, and narratives;
- quantitative methods, which include using surveys, undertaking statistical analysis, and other ways of collecting data, which aim to study phenomena broadly and provide generalizable explanations, yield data in the form of charts, numbers, and yes/no responses.

All research starts with questions that establish what you will study, and sets limits or boundaries to exclude what you will not study. Good questions seek constructive and insightful answers that move knowledge forward or, as Hale and Napier (2013) suggest, “the research question acts as a plan for your project” (p. 8). It could focus on interactions among people (see Brunson, 2011; Roy, 2000) or observe how people experience their identity (see Stone, 2009).

Key Questions

- What type of research is typically reported on in the news?
- Which type of data are you more likely to believe?

As you progress through this textbook, the differences among the disciplines will become clear; their theories focus on different aspects of the world and people, they ask different kinds of questions, and although their methods sometimes overlap, what they have (or will) contribute to the field of IS will be different. Reading about these disciplines will also provide an idea of the challenge in creating a combined and all-inclusive theory for IS.

To our minds, IS is the encompassing term for studies of interpreting between any language pair, while Sign Language Interpreting Studies (SLIS) is an area of study embedded within IS. Whether a scholar works in literature, geography, or mathematics, if they are studying interpreting, they are also doing IS. We suggest that the field is *transdisciplinary*. That is, IS scholars come at the examination of interpreting from different disciplines. This exploration then benefits from multiple disciplinary perspectives simultaneously, rather than simply examining interpreting through sociology, or linguistics, or cognitive psychology. This approach can potentially bridge more holistic analyses of interpreting, which would become both the form and the theory of IS and its subdiscipline, SLIS, alike.

INTERPRETING STUDIES

IS is a recent development within universities. Its primary mission is to investigate the practice of interpreting in both signed and spoken languages. While interpreter education programs are beginning to use the term, no current programs have gathered faculty from the aforementioned variety of disciplines included here. Without this mix of faculty and disciplinary training, a crossover and blending of disciplines the field arguably deserves cannot be achieved.

As a new discipline, IS strives to bring together different ideas of interpreting: an historical process, a translation process, a linguistic process, a sociological process, a social–psychological process and a cognitive process, among others. A unified theory of IS would describe how interpreting happens as an event created by relationships between people. However, constructing this is and will be difficult, as it must not only account for three primary people (or more) and their interaction, but also for layers of social and psychological forces and norms. With so many concepts at play, it is like putting together a puzzle the size of a shopping mall/center!

Typically, conducting research on the interpreting process seeks to explain how all its parts move and come together. Determining how best to pursue such studies is precisely where other disciplines have assisted. That is, IS has borrowed methodological practices from other disciplines to investigate interpreting. For example, cognitive processes have been examined experimentally (see Gerver, 1976), the

linguistic process has been examined through video recordings (see Van Herreweghe, 2002), social forces have been examined through ethnographic observations (see Angelelli, 2004; Berk-Seligson, 1990) and interviews (see Inghilleri, 2003), and norms and identity have been examined (see McKee & Awheto, 2010). Clearly, there are many different paths to understanding the process, and the future of IS necessitates a combination of these paths to present a more holistic picture, which further captures this transdisciplinary nature of IS.

It is likely that the best research and scholarship will continue to emerge from people who study within specific disciplines. That is, a university's IS department cannot examine the full range of interpreting practices unless recognized scholars from various disciplines who have researched interpreting are involved and engaged. This effort would also require some acknowledgment in funding applications and other disciplinary practices from both universities and funding bodies to properly express how such transdisciplinary practices are emerging. Consequently, perhaps scholars can then create a truly transdisciplinary effort to study interpreting.

GENERAL STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book is designed to serve as a textbook for undergraduate and postgraduate interpreting courses, such as a senior capstone course (in the US), or an interpreting theory course. It also functions as a theoretical introduction for students, researchers, instructors, and practitioners. We aim to help readers develop an understanding of how the practical everyday concerns in interpreting work are also the concerns of research and scholarship. As students progress in their education, the frameworks presented here can provide a guide to the intensely complex nature of interpreting. This book may provide a stimulating introduction to a range of theoretical approaches in interpreting, which are relevant both for those engaged in academic study of interpretation and for professional practitioners. Nonetheless, closer examinations and further reading of specific issues that greatly interest students are both encouraged.

Like other works, this book is necessarily selective. The theories and approaches covered have been chosen for their strong influence on IS, as determined by us, the authors. Other equally worthy

material had to be excluded due to constraints of space and overall focus. Over recent years, the field has continued to grow with a considerable increase in the number of publications (journals, books, edited volumes, and digital resources) and the borrowing of concepts from areas such as cognitive studies, cultural studies, and critical race studies. Naturally, the organization of this book gives preference to theorists who have, arguably, advanced major new ideas, and gives less than sufficient space to the many scholars who work in the field producing detailed case studies or less highly profiled work.

The development of ideas also progresses from the introductory (presenting the historical evolution in Chapter 2) and traditional disciplines (translation and linguistics) to the more recent disciplines (sociology, social psychology, cognitive psychology), as readers become more accustomed to the terminology and concepts. Generally, this sequence is based on familiarity. We begin with disciplines that have held a long-standing seat at the table of interpreting research and move to those fields that have only recently come to the table. However, it is also conceptual, since some of the earlier theories and concepts (such as equivalence and universals of interpreting) are constantly revisited.

Our aim is to present a balanced survey of six major disciplines as well as the important trends of and contributions to IS in a single book, written in an accessible manner. The key questions within and the discussion questions at the end of each chapter are designed to encourage further thinking, conversation, and exploration of interpreting issues. A final chapter in which the various ways each discipline might research a major topic in sign language interpreting is also included.

Style

We have opted to use the feminine pronouns *she* and *her* throughout this book when referring to interpreters for two overlapping reasons. First, we recognize the simple fact that a majority of interpreters are women, which is somewhat unsurprising given that throughout history women have been charged with the responsibility of caregiving—a paradigm that also supports the notion of interpreting as care work. Our second reason is to pay homage to the countless women who

have worked to develop the field itself. Their work may have included workshops, discussions, mentoring, articles, books, or classes. We proudly stand on their shoulders and hope not to disappoint them with our small contribution.

IS is not alone in the testosterone-washing of history. Most of the authors of the articles cited and a majority of the scholars discussed throughout this book are white, temporarily abled, and presumably heterosexual men. This is not because women, LGBTQ individuals, persons of color, or persons with disabilities have not contributed or attempted to contribute to the thinking about these issues. Their work has greatly influenced the study of interpreting, but they have been systematically hidden throughout history. As they have remained in the closet, institutionalized, or been responsible for care work at home, white, temporarily abled, presumably heterosexual men have been able to take center stage.

Throughout this text, the term *interpreting* is frequently used on its own; we consider it to be all-inclusive for both spoken and signed language interpreting. The process of interpreting is independent of identifying specific languages. Understandably, there are differences involved when a language pair is signed and spoken as opposed to spoken and spoken, or signed and signed. However, these differences are perceived as insignificant when considering the process of interpreting.

Finally, we would be remiss if we did not address the two stylistic features that readers will likely notice. The first is our decision not to use the term *hearing* when referring to people who are not deaf. A more in-depth discussion with examples is provided in Chapters 5 and 6, suffice it to say we suggest that HEARING is a gloss that fails to take into account the cultural and symbolic meaning intended by signers. The second feature is using a lowercase “d” when discussing deaf people, which we believe to be an inclusive term. As recognized, the use of an uppercase “D” in Deaf is customary in the US, but this refers only to those who accept and identify with Deaf culture. Here, people who have become deaf later in life, those who prefer to socialize with non-deaf people and do not know sign language, and those who reject the term *Deaf* are not included. Therefore, *deaf* refers to all people who, in society, are excluded from full access because of their level of hearing. These individuals may or may not use sign language

interpreters. Alternatively, *Deaf* is reserved for the specific cultural markers of Deaf culture and Deaf community. (Leave it to academics to complicate the status quo!)

Key Terms

Certain words have been emphasized in italics, as we believe them to be part of academic language or discourse, and academic history. Scholars use these words as part of their presentations, articles, and everyday discussions. It is our assertion that students, in their endeavor to become scholars, should be conversant with this discourse.

CHAPTERS

Each chapter follows a similar format containing:

- objectives that students should be able to discuss by the end of the chapter
- the main text, discussing historical circumstances, central issues, and research studies of the discipline
- a brief summary
- key questions and discussion questions to stimulate further thought
- suggestions for further reading

We encourage students and interested readers to find and read primary texts to follow up ideas that are raised in each chapter and to investigate the research being carried out in their own countries and languages. As such, this book should ideally be used in conjunction with readings mentioned in the preface and be supported by an institution's library resources. An attempt has also been made to refer to many works that are readily available, with references provided at the close of this book. Particular emphasis has been placed on encouraging reflection, investigation, building an awareness of this new discipline, and on applying theories to both practice and research.

Each of the chapters begins with the title "Through the Lens of" (e.g., "Through the Lens of History"), with the disciplines discussed

being the “lenses” that scholars use to examine and study interpreting. This provides an overview of each discipline, its major theoretical ideas, and scholars from those disciplines who have contributed to IS. Also discussed are the issues and concerns of interpreting that have been studied within the framework of each specific discipline. This book has been structured to function as a textbook in interpreting courses, both practical and theoretical. However, each chapter can also stand alone to ensure readers with specific focuses can find the discussions that align most to their interests.

This book contains eight chapters, each of which could be covered in two or three weeks, depending on the length of a course, or used together over the course of an academic semester. We can also imagine a scenario in which students are required to read parts of the book during one part of their training and the other parts during later parts of their training. For example, it might be useful for students and teachers to use the translation chapter during a translation course, the history chapter during an introduction to interpreting course, and the social psychology chapter during an ethics of interpreting course. The discussion points can then be used during a research of senior thesis course, as they provide substantial initial material for students to develop their own research.

SUMMARY

Society has benefited greatly from different disciplines. Such work has uncovered that the Earth is not the center of the universe thanks to scholars in astronomy, has eradicated certain diseases thanks to scholars in epidemiology, and, on occasion, has predicted certain weather patterns due to those in meteorology. Psychology has taught us that human’s language-processing center is in the left hemisphere of the brain, and anthropology has revealed chimpanzees’ kinships with one another.

This chapter has generally reviewed the critical elements of disciplines and outlined their various components of theory and focus. The idea that interpreting is not only a practice but a scholarly discipline has also been introduced. Imagine the benefits of examining interpreting through multiple disciplines; indeed, the transdisciplinary nature of IS allows for that holistic examination.

This book has been organized into chapters that include objectives, a main text, a brief summary, discussion questions, and further readings. Key terms are emphasised in italics. Along the way we have introduced you to our writing style and our politics, including our decision to avoid the masculine pronoun “he” when talking about interpreters, and to refrain from the use of “hearing” as a way to describe people who are not deaf.

FURTHER READINGS

- Pöchhacker, F. (2015). *Routledge encyclopedia of interpreting studies*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Pöchhacker, F. (2016). *Introducing interpreting studies* (2nd ed.). London, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Pöchhacker, F., & Shlesinger, M. (Eds.). (2002). *The interpreting studies reader*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hughes, W., & Lavery, J. (2014). *Critical thinking: An introduction the basic skills* (Canadian 7th ed.). Toronto, Ontario: Broadview Press.