

## **Deep and Meaningful Conversation:**

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### **Challenging Interpreter Impartiality in the**

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### **Semantics and Pragmatics Classroom**

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This chapter challenges the reality of two related notions that are central to interpreter behavior, namely that interpreters are not actively involved in creating the discourse that they “mediate” and that they are impartial with respect to both the message and the participants in an interpreted event.<sup>1</sup> While much has been said regarding the myth of neutrality vis-à-vis interpreters in medical settings (Metzger, 1999), police interviews (Wadensjö, 1998), and other legal domains (e.g., Brennan & Brown, 1997), we wish to look at the particular challenges that interpreters face in the postgraduate education environment, specifically, in a classroom dedicated to introducing topics in semantics and pragmatics.

We suggest that the challenge of discussing the semantics of one language in interpretation demands that the interpreter make decisions on several levels. We outline some of these and consider the consequences of such decisions. We also discuss the role of consultation with students and staff regarding the appropriateness of message transfer and contrast the practice of active preparation, as well as consulting and decision making both on and off task, with the notion of the interpreter as mediator and impartial bystander.

Finally we suggest that, while the decisions that interpreters make in a semantics or pragmatics classroom are influenced by a metalinguistic framework, similar decisions are made in other interpreted domains, but the nature of interpreter decision making and information management as a necessary component of successful interpretation is typically overlooked. We propose that the highly embedded model of interpreter as conduit continues to influence our understanding of the interpreters’ role and that this needs to be challenged in order for us to appreciate more fully the nature of co-constructed interpreted discourse in action.

## **THE CHALLENGES OF INTERPRETING SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS**

In this section we look at some of the challenges that are specific to the interpretation of semantics and pragmatics. We begin by considering interpreting as a three-party exchange, that is, a *triadic interaction* (Wadensjö, 1998), and argue that, while classroom interaction in a traditional lecture session may not be as interactively participatory as other triadic domains, it is nonetheless a situation in which two languages are being used, typically in simultaneous mode, with the potential for communication breakdown. We then examine the ways in which the interpreter's understanding of the function of the interpreting event can aid in preparation and on-task work. Finally we look at how the historic relationship between Irish Sign Language and English presents specific challenges to interpretation, particularly when the focus of the interpreting event is on a metalinguistic discussion of the meaning of words and the ways in which they are contextually driven.

### **Interpreting: A Triadic Interaction**

Interpreting involves a default of two language participants who wish to interact but do not share a common language, along with an interpreter, whose role it is to facilitate the interaction between these parties. In the classroom setting that our discussion focuses on, the main participants are the professor (a hearing man in his 50s); the Deaf students (both in the 30–45 age group; one male and one female), and the two female interpreters (both in their 30s). The hearing students attending the class are also participants, and we could say much about how the interpreters' presence affects their time in class. However, in this chapter we focus on the interpreters, the Deaf students, and the professor. While we are particularly concerned with the issues that arise in a linguistics classroom, many of the topics we raise apply equally to other domains, whether in tertiary education or indeed outside the educational sphere. For example, we believe that interpreting at the tertiary education level and conference interpreting have much in common. Several contextual factors that are relevant to the classroom subject matter can influence interpretation, including the following:

- Both interpreters know the Deaf students and work with them as teaching colleagues in another setting.

- One of the interpreters has known the professor for more than a decade and works closely with him in an academic setting.
- The interpreters have known each other for a decade and have worked closely in a wide range of settings.

As a result, some of the relationships between the participants in this setting extend beyond the actual assignment itself. In an Irish context, it is not unusual for interpreters and Deaf interpreters to know each other, often very well. The Irish Deaf community is very small: Matthews (1996) reports that there are approximately five thousand Deaf Irish Sign Language users in the Republic of Ireland. However, the country has very few interpreters—at present around fifty, but at the time of interpreting this course (2003), only about twenty-four interpreters were available. Given this, we can say that, especially in educational settings, where the same interpreter is working with the same Deaf students over an academic year, relationships evolve. This is reflected to some extent in the informal interaction that takes place between participants. As we will see, this in no way suggests that the interpreters become decision makers in interactions in which they should be impartial. Instead, we maintain that interpreters *do* make decisions about how to frame their target language (TL) output and, as the literature notes, about their responses to other participants in the interaction, the potential consequences of such decisions for the TL, the participants, the dynamics of the situation, their own professional standing, and that of their profession (for example, see Leeson, 2005a, 2005b). These factors interact with the fact that Irish Sign Language (ISL) is an evolving language that has been used in academic classrooms for fewer than twenty years. The consequences of this include lexical gaps for register-specific terminology, which is challenging for interpreters and students alike.

### **Course Aims and Objectives**

When preparing for an interpreting assignment, interpreters draw on the context that they will be working in to frame their preliminary judgments regarding their task. In this classroom situation, the professor is a native English speaker, and the two Deaf students use ISL. The course is an introduction to semantics and pragmatics that is given in the first semester of a master's degree program. The course focuses primarily on the semantics of English, and an English language textbook is used. The terminology that refers to semantic and pragmatic concepts is discussed

and debated in class. Students are referred to particular textbook chapters that expand on the ideas discussed in class, and they are expected to read the relevant chapters and complete certain assignments before the following week's class. Thus there is a bridging of expectation between the textbook and the lectures.

For interpreters, this raises the issue of dealing with concepts in interpretation versus transliteration. That is, even if an item can be interpreted into ISL, should the interpreter use the ISL sign, fingerspell the item, use a calque sign (a literal transfer of the morphemes of the source language item), or use a nonce sign (that is, a sign that will be used only for the duration of the interpretation)? For example, the term "logic" can be used in its generic sense in English, but the term is also used as a specialist term in formal semantics. Semanticists differentiate between different kinds of logic, including "propositional logic," in which the truth effects of connectives are studied in formal semantics. This follows from the fact that semanticists call a sentence's truth or falsehood a "truth value" (Saeed, 2003, pp. 89–90). Other logic-related issues discussed by semanticists include modal logic, logical operators, and predicate logic (see *ibid.*, chapter 10, for an overview). Irish Sign Language, however, has a sign that we can gloss as LOGIC, which is typically used in a generic way to mean "logical" or "sensible." But this is articulated in the same manner and at the same location as the ISL sign for SENSE (i.e., "common sense" or "sensible"). This sign is also a tempting equivalent for the semantic notion of "sense" that we discuss later. In these situations, opinions vary on what an interpreter should do: Llewellyn-Jones (1999) and colleagues suggest that transliteration and fingerspelling may work best; Deaf informants in an Irish sample proposed nonce signs as a viable option (Leeson, 2005b), but Stratiy (2005) rejects these.

One problem is that interpreters have no way of guaranteeing that the client will comprehend the TL lexical item that they choose to convey the meaning embedded in the source language (SL). This can lead to a breakdown between the interpreter's intentionality and the audience's understanding of the presenter's point. While this situation may arise in any interpreting setting, a potential for misunderstanding arises when specialist terminology coincides with lexical items that crop up in everyday discourse, where they are used in a different sense. This risk may be greater than is the case when the SL introduces new vocabulary that does not have existing TL collocations or generic uses of the specialist lexical item in the TL (e.g., thematic roles, hyponymy).

The interpreter's decisions are often guided by the fact that the students will have encountered a term in the textbook before class or will do so when they read the relevant chapter after class. Indeed, Sandler (1995, p. 5) made this point when referring to the interpretation of linguistics: "The material is academic: the academic register requires use of the English terminology; and the students have to be able to recognize the English term when they read it."

Other pertinent factors include the following:

- The Deaf students are bilingual.
- A lexical item may or may not exist in ISL.
- The students may express a preference for one lexical sign over another.
- While on task, a nonce sign is agreed upon and maintained throughout the course.

As mentioned earlier, the fact that this particular course focused on the semantics of English also influenced the interpreting decisions. We were constantly conscious of the potential for an interpretation to mislead students into believing that the professor was making universal statements about semantics and pragmatics or implying that the semantics of ISL are the same as those of English. We felt this would be a possible outcome if we interpreted the English sentences that formed the basis of class discussion into ISL. To have done so would have produced very different semantic analyses given verb classification and the attendant semantics of certain polymorphemic or classifier verbs in ISL. The verb "to hit," while something of an "old chestnut" works well here: In English, information about an instrument that is used to hit someone is added after the verb; that is, it is encoded lexically and results in sentences such as "I hit him with the **frying pan**." In ISL, as in other signed languages, this information is encoded in what are usually called "classifier predicates" (although we note the controversy over the naming of such structures. See Schembri [2003] for an excellent discussion of the issue).

Thus, if an example with the verb "hit" was used in class, an ISL interpretation would usually encode information about the fact that the agent (the person doing the hitting) used a fist or a flat hand or held an instrument in a specific way when doing the hitting. Semantic analyses of ISL show that information about the agent is embedded in such a verb, and the path of motion ends at the point in space (the locus) associated with the patient (i.e., the person receiving the action, in this

case, the person who is hit). In English, however, while “hit” involves both the agent and the patient of the action, it does not encode information about the instrument. That information must be added by the speaker (e.g., “He hit me with a **hammer**”). The point is that information is packaged differently in different languages. For interpreters in the semantics classroom, this knowledge must guide all of their decisions. They must reflect consciously and extensively on the metalinguistic aspects of their task and the semantic relations between the SL and the TL.

To avoid misunderstandings, we agreed, in collaboration with the Deaf students, to transliterate the English sentences and then interpret the discussion of the example’s semantic or pragmatic properties in ISL. This maintained the notion that the discussion was about the semantic or pragmatic properties of English, not ISL. This was successful insofar as the students themselves entered into discussions during break times about the relative similarity or difference in semantic and pragmatic encoding in ISL and English.

However, the use of signed English was embedded in the ISL structures and did not in any way replace ISL. That is, when the interpreters used signed English to establish the SL example, they presented the sentence as if it were printed on a page; in other words, they used signing space to position the sentence.<sup>2</sup> The interpreters then co-referenced the loci established for each argument in order to demonstrate relationships. This use of locus establishment, co-referencing, and placement is typical of signed language interaction, and it makes sense to maximize the usefulness of these structures, even when talking about another language.

### **ISL as an Evolving Language**

As mentioned earlier, ISL is an evolving language that is just beginning to be used in academic environments. Thus, in many domains, lexical gaps exist, typically for concepts or terms that have hitherto not been discussed in ISL, primarily because Irish Deaf people have traditionally not been actively involved in these fields (e.g., law, medicine, finance). One outcome of this is the inappropriate use of established signs in a given context; signers are using certain signs that hold generic meaning to refer to more specific, restricted sets of meanings. Signers choose them apparently because they are glossed with an English word that crops up in an English source language text. For example, although it is possible to say “the store is now in operation,” one would not sign SHOP NOW OPERATION. In general, OPERATION refers to a medical op-

eration and is contextually driven (i.e., the context determines where OPERATION is located on the signer's body; for example, was it an operation on the ear, the torso, etc.?). This type of substitution can be considered a miscue (Cokely, 1992).

However, similar literal transpositions of an English SL can also occur in educational contexts and are deliberately chosen by signers as a humorous mnemonic. This use of so-called calque terms, in which the morphemes of the SL are borrowed intact into the TL (where they can strike an observer as being odd contextually) is quite common in ISL, particularly with respect to proper nouns. For example, the place-name Ballsbridge is signed as BALLS+BRIDGE, and the Irish government board established to offer redress to survivors of abuse in educational establishments is referred to (by some signers) as the RED+DRESS BOARD (redress board). While interpreters are trained to avoid such morpheme-for-morpheme or word-for-word replacement in favor of producing equivalent meaning in the TL, it happens nevertheless, either as a conscious decision or as a function of fatigue or processing overload. An example of this occurred during a lecture on the notion of truth and logic in semantics:

Example 1.

SL : As we know, historically speaking, logic springs from an interest in language; it springs from an interest in the correct use of argument. Even before that—the effective use of argument.

TL: LOGIC IDEA LINK INTEREST LANGUAGE//HOW RIGHT WAY USE LANGUAGE/  
/BEFORE HOW BEST USE LANGUAGE FOR **ARGUMENT** (“a quarrel”)//DEBATE

In Example 1 the interpreter's fatigue resulted in the use of ARGUMENT, meaning “a dispute between two or more parties.” This conveyed a different connotation from the one the SL speaker intended, which was the discussion of logical argumentation. In that context a point (an argument) is presented to support or oppose a proposition. However, the interpreter realized that this lexical choice was contextually inappropriate and added DEBATE/DISCUSS to clarify the meaning.

The use of similarly inappropriate TL lexical choices occurred in this classroom when a metalinguistic term also referred to real-world referents (e.g., an actor, a goal, a patient) or when an SL register-specific item could be used in a more generic way in the TL (e.g., sense, reference, logic, argument).

Additionally, bilingual signed language users play with the relationship between English and ISL. For example, CL.-LEGS (STAND) can be

reversed for humorous effect to mean “understand,” drawing parallels with the use of the morphological process in English *under+stand*. Instead of using calque (which would lead to *UNDER+STAND*), the signer instead plays with the classifier form that represents animate entities. This affects interpretation in the linguistics classroom when a meta-linguistic term can also refer to a real-world referent, for example, an actor or a goal. In the classroom setting we encountered many situations in which one word was used in a range of different or extended senses that exist in English but do not necessarily exist in ISL.

Another issue is homonymy, in which several words share the same form but have a range of meanings. For example, the word “sense” can refer to a physical sense such as touch or taste; it can also indicate common sense. In semantics it can signify the semantic links between elements in the vocabulary (e.g., we talk about a word that is used in a particular “sense”). Yet another example arose in a lecture on word meanings:

Example 2.

1. He felt a python wrap itself around his neck.
2. “I’ll drink that Beck’s by the neck,” he smirked.
3. His idea of a night out was to neck in the car.

Neck 1: noun; part of the body connecting the head and shoulders

Neck 2: noun; narrow part of a bottle, near the mouth

Neck 3: verb; kiss and caress amorously

In ISL, “neck” does not function as a homonym. In translation, interpreters normally seek an equivalent TL meaning that is driven by the context, with the result that the SL form is lost. Yet the reason the professor cited these examples to illustrate homonymy in English. An interpretation, while semantically equivalent, would fail in terms of functionality because it would not capture the crux of the professor’s message.

Therefore, one facet of the interpreter’s task is to decide when it is appropriate to opt for a literal (Nida, 1964) or a “free” interpretation (Napier, 1998).<sup>3</sup> Of course, in Example 2 the interpreter is constantly mediating aspects of both formal and dynamic equivalence in the TL output and is making conscious decisions about how these aspects interrelate and which approach is most suitable at any particular point in the interpretation. This mirrors Janzen’s (2005) view of sophisticated interpretation as that which occurs when the interpreter attends to both form and meaning (thus formal and dynamic equivalence) in every text.



He notes that, for some texts, dynamic equivalence is primary (and perhaps total), whereas in others it is not. Furthermore, as is evident in Example 2, the emphasis on any one approach to interpreting can shift within a single assignment and not only from assignment to assignment, as the literature often implies.

The range of meanings associated with a word (or the range of words that is expressed in the same formal representation) is, of course, an issue for every language. In the semantics classroom we were particularly conscious of this fact as one word was sometimes used in several different senses even within the same lecture. For example, the word “sense,” as discussed earlier, was used in a variety of settings, with a range of meanings, often derivable from context. In addition, when two words exist for two concepts in English, there may be only one sign for both of these concepts in ISL (i.e., they are not homonyms in English but are in ISL). An example of this arose in a lecture on word meaning, when the professor was discussing “ambiguity” and “vagueness.” In ISL one would normally interpret these concepts using the same sign, but in this context it was necessary to differentiate between the two.

Since these sessions were being interpreted simultaneously, time pressure affected the number of options available to the interpreters. When no word-for-word lexical equivalent exists, interpreters have several strategies to draw on, but a tension exists between maximally utilizing these options (e.g., paraphrasing, describing) and accepting the consequences of such action on subsequent parts of the message. Baker (1992) discusses the choice of options open to translators when seeking TL equivalence at lexical, sentential, and textual levels, while Gile (1995) explains strategies that spoken language interpreters employ and the consequences of their choices. Leeson (2005a, 2005b) discusses the effects of these and other strategies used by signed language interpreters. For example, paraphrasing extends the interpreter’s processing time (or lag time, as it is sometimes called in Europe) and may divert attention from the subsequent SL message, leading to a gap in the TL message.

## **THE INTERPRETER**

### **Interpreter-Created Messages**

Interpreters create messages. Although they are not the original author of the source language message, their decisions about the relative

weighting to give to an element in a target language are conscious ones. Interpreters make decisions about how SL information is best conveyed in the TL. Modifications are sometimes made in order to clarify a message, including the use of strategic additions, omissions, and substitutions to shape a meaningful and complete TL (Baker, 1992; Leeson, 2005a). Indeed, Jones (1998) states that successful interpreters must “pick up the . . . ideas that make up the backbone of . . . [a] speech and lay sufficient emphasis on them in the interpretation: verbal redundancies should be cut down to a minimum; digressions, extraneous comparisons and rhetoric may be kept in the translation but should have the right relative weight in the overall context of the speech; and the interpreter must not let the form of the speech—quantifying clauses, hesitations, corrections, verbal prevarication—distract them from the substance” (p. 3). All of these activities demand a conscious interaction with the SL message and a series of split-second decisions by the interpreter.

Beyond the fact that interpreters make decisions about meaning, the appropriate transfer of message, and the weighting to give to portions of the message (for example, Is this the central point? Is this redundant?), the interpreter’s degree of involvement in interpreting events has also come under scrutiny. In contrast to approaches that see the interpreter as an uninvolved “machine” or “conduit,” Wadensjö (1998) sees interpreter-mediated interaction as “sustained activity” or, specifically, as “an *instance of a particular kind of three-party interaction*” (p. 18). She states that participant status conditions the organization of talk in interpreted events at a global level (i.e., the police interrogation or, for us, the semantics and pragmatics lecture) and at a local level (i.e., how the interaction is structured on a turn-by-turn basis). She says that the interpreter’s task involves a “coordination” aspect and presents an overview of the “distribution of knowledge and responsibility amongst speakers, and interdependencies between speakers and between communicative activities in interpreter-mediated interaction” (ibid., p. 279).

These findings are generally mirrored by Metzger (1999), who challenges the notion of interpreter “neutrality”: “Interpreters are *participants within interactive discourse and not mere conduits to it*” (p. 204). She considers both the fact that interpreters are ethically guided to be neutral and the notion that, at the same time, they do not have an impact on the interpreted discourse as a paradox. This leads her to pose the question with which she ends her book: “Should interpreters pursue full participation rights within interpreted encounters? Or should

interpreters attempt to minimize, where possible, their influence within interpreted interaction?”

Despite the fact that the interpreted classroom we are discussing does not entail much turn taking among participants (because of the lecture format, the interpretation is mostly from English to ISL, with only a little student participation during question-and-answer sessions), evidence suggests that, even in less interactive frameworks, interpreters are participants on many levels.

### **Interpreters as Impartial Participants**

Robinson (1997) sees interpreters as pretenders: “Translators and interpreters make a living out of pretending to be (or at least to speak or write as if they were) licensed practitioners of professions that they have typically never practiced” (p. 148). He goes on to cite Paul Kussmaul (1995), who says that expert behavior is “acquired role playing” (p. 33). In this interpreted classroom, the interpreters’ knowledge and training mean that they are not neutral bystanders: One of the interpreters has a PhD in linguistics and is an active linguistics researcher, while the other has a BSc in anthropology and has completed some sign linguistics courses. The interpreters make judgment calls with respect to the professor’s intention when discussing a point, and these calls are informed by their understanding of the lecture. Interpreters construct meaning by drawing on their own knowledge of the world. This fact is far removed from the idea that words contain meanings; thus, so as long as one knows the words of a language, one understands. Thus, a cognitive, constructionist view of communication can inform our understanding of what interpreters do (see Wilcox & Shaffer, 2005).

Add to this the fact that we each bring our own understanding of the world to bear on everything we observe (Turner, 2005) and that interpreters are obliged to make choices given what we understand a message to mean (Turner & Harrington, 2001). This individual response to communicative events is clearly variable and suggests that in highly specific topic domains, interpreters who have expertise in that domain will be best skilled to make the most sense of what is being discussed. In this instance, one interpreter held a PhD in linguistics, while the other had some basic knowledge of linguistics: This meant that the interpreter with the postgraduate linguistics background was better able to interpret, given that she readily understood the content, while the interpreter without a postgraduate linguistics background was conscious of working

with greater attention on understanding than in domains in which she had an established knowledge base.

Since both interpreters were also university lecturers, their decision making was also informed by their knowledge of classroom interaction, such as knowing when it is appropriate to interrupt a speaker and when doing so would not facilitate interpretation or would even alienate the Deaf students from the speakers. This scenario might occur when a shy hearing student does not speak clearly when responding to a question from the professor. The interpreter may ask the professor to ask the student to repeat the point, but if it remains unintelligible to both the interpreter and the co-interpreter, then the interpreter may, in agreement with the Deaf students, not seek a third repetition. An alternative and a more successful means of accessing the SL content in such a situation occurred when the professor paraphrased the student's response. This benefited not only the interpreters and Deaf students but also the other hearing students, who also could not hear the original speaker.

Such partiality vis-à-vis the message, guided by knowledge about the subject, the course structure, and the participants in an event, is useful in helping the interpreter make decisions. That is, interpreters can use all of the information at their disposal when deciding how to best present an appropriate TL. Thus, interpretation is not just about how the interpreter deals with the individual words and sentences of the SL as they arise in a lecture. Interpreters must think contextually. For example, Leeson (2005b) discusses how ISL/English interpreters deal with socio-linguistic variation. Knowing the audience and predicting its preferences are key factors for success. Preferences include gendered signs, regional variants, frequency of fingerspelling, and use of signed English.

### **Interpreter Participation in Banter: Participant Status Acknowledged**

The idea of interpreter neutrality can be questioned with respect to collaboration with Deaf students, even while on task. For example, both students and interpreters played on the relative relationship between lexical terms used in semantics and in the literal translation of these terms to ISL. For example, “patient”—the recipient of an action—became SICK PERSON, and “goal” (the entity toward which something moves) became FOOTBALL (soccer) GOAL. The presence of humor between the interpreters and the Deaf students promoted a relaxed working relationship.

These wordplays were not maintained as nonce signs throughout the course: They were simply a bit of light (linguistic) relief that built on the shared bilingual status of the students and the interpreters. The data we recorded showed a number of such incidences. Some were initiated by the interpreter, as the following example shows:

Example 3.

Before class, the interpreter and the Deaf students good-naturedly discussed the professor, who habitually signed the ISL sign NOW with an incorrect orientation of the hands. When the professor arrived, the first thing he said was “Now . . .” In light of the preceding discussion, the interpreter intentionally misarticulated NOW, using the incorrect orientation of the palms as previously discussed by the students.

Other humorous events were instigated by the Deaf students or the professor but referred to the interpreter in some way. This indicates an awareness of the interpreter’s presence and hints at how the participants view the interpreter’s role:

Example 4.

One of the Deaf students had received funds for a laptop computer and a note taker who took notes on the laptop during class. Another student did not receive money for a laptop computer but had funds for signed language interpretation. In reality, both students had shared access to both the transcribed notes and the interpretation, but the notion of *not* sharing access to these supports was jokingly mentioned. Following a scenario in which the note taker was unable to access the computer because she did not know the password, there was a discussion about the fact that at least interpreters did not require passwords in order for users to get them to work. This was followed by other exchanges that drew on the concept of “interpreter as machine.” For example, the Deaf student who did not own the laptop pretended to be offended and, in collusion with the interpreter, insisted that the interpreter move to a position where her fellow student could not see the interpretation. When the fellow student moved to see the interpretation, the first student responded by “switching off” the interpreter with the REMOTE-CONTROL.

In this example humor was embedded in a literal mapping between the fact that machines are not autonomous and can be turned on and off at will (i.e., they can be controlled) and the “machine model of interpreting”

(i.e., interpreters are machines; they are not autonomous; they do only what the client wishes them to do; thus, the client controls the interpreter). This merges with the fact that, at that moment, the students were “fighting” over access to a real machine (i.e., the laptop computer) and the interpreters (“the interpreting machines”). The metaphoric mapping of concepts (i.e., machines have remote controls and can be switched on and off when they are not needed; interpreters are machines; therefore, we can switch them off when they are not needed) is highly effective. While the students would not consider the machine model of interpreting to accurately reflect the interpreter’s role, they were aware of its existence and drew on it very successfully. Indeed, the comparison was so successful that it was maintained throughout the course and always raised a laugh from both the Deaf students and the interpreters.

The interpreter’s presence was also playfully referred to in class dialogue between the professor and the class:

#### Example 5.

When the professor realized that the interpreters would not participate by responding to questions from the textbook during the question-and-answer sessions, he advised those students who were struggling with questions that, if they wanted to be excused from answering, they could simply state, “I’m an interpreter.”

This example illustrates the visibility of the interpreter in the classroom setting and the fact that the interpreter’s participation is recognized as having certain boundaries that do not constrain the interaction of other participants.

In summary, the amusing exchanges about the interpreter reflect an awareness of the interpreter’s role in the classroom interaction while recognizing the constraints that limit the interpreter’s degree of participation. Significantly, such references, which acknowledge the interpreters as professionals who play a novel role in the classroom environment, serves to ratify them (Metzger, 1999), something typically reserved for participants in an event. The fact that the interpreters are ratified by each other, the Deaf students, the professor, and some of the hearing students (who would occasionally try out the “I am an interpreter” line in an attempt to avoid answering a question) demonstrates just how far from the interpreter as invisible conduit we are, even though our participation remains, of necessity, in the background.

## **CONSULTATION AS STRATEGY**

In the course of interpreting these sessions, the interpreters consulted with a wide range of parties. Each facet of consultation has specific characteristics that are governed by what the interpreter hopes to achieve in maximizing access in an interpreted classroom using the metalanguage of linguistics. Individual consultation, when necessary, took place both prior to and after each session with the professor, Deaf students and the co-interpreter.

### **The Hearing Professor**

The interpreters consulted with the professor regarding the course plan and class content. Preparatory notes were forwarded to the interpreters ahead of time to aid in their preparation for class. We also discussed the management of the information the professor planned to present: We needed clarification from the professor that this class would deal with the semantics of English in particular, though, in places, general statements on semantics would be made. Such clarification was necessary in order for us to consider how to frame our interpretation of specific examples.

Consultation also took place when problems arose (e.g., when overlapping talk in the question-and-answer sessions made it impossible to interpret effectively, the interpreters asked the professor to remind the students that only one person could contribute at a time, which he duly did). The interactive nature of the classroom setting meant that, during the question-and-answer sessions, there was obligatory contribution from the floor (i.e., the professor required the students to answer the questions that he had posed the previous week). Some comments were difficult to hear due to overlapping discourse, as well as students who mumbled or spoke too quietly. The interpreters indicated to the professor that this was an issue, which he responded to by repeating the question clearly and allowing for interpretation. This was a “universal” adjustment insofar as, when the professor reiterated a question or comment from the floor, the hearing students (who otherwise could not hear the remarks) could hear the questions and comments from their fellow students, and the interpreters could work them into ISL.

### **The Deaf Students**

A number of environmentally driven issues arose, including where the interpreter would sit and the appropriateness of lighting. Linguistic

consultation also took place on the challenges of handling register-specific lexical gaps in ISL for the fields of semantics and pragmatics. Nonce signs were often agreed to both before and during the interpreted discourse. Typically students would negotiate a sign among themselves and then inform the interpreters of their preference so that these nonce items could be incorporated into the TL output. One such example is the sign for “pragmatics,” *DEPEND SITUATION*. This sign derived from an earlier form for pragmatics, *DEPEND CONTEXT*, but because the discussion of pragmatics entails discussion of contextual cues (e.g., for inferencing), the nonce sign was modified to *DEPEND SITUATION*.

This use of nonce signs relates to Sandler’s (1995) discussion of linguistic settings. She states that such signs remain active for the duration of an event but do not automatically become established signs. What is interesting in the Irish context is that, over the course of the past fifteen years (when the first Deaf students began studying linguistics), a number of signs that had originally emerged as nonce signs have become the established lexical items in ISL for these concepts. Examples include the sign for “semantics” (a compound, *MEAN^DEEP*) and the sign for “cognition” (a compound, *THINK^WELL-OILED-MACHINE*), both of which Deaf students originally coined as nonce signs but which, with the evolution of a small but robust sign linguistics community, have entered into the register-specific lexicon of ISL.

As mentioned earlier, the use of signed English for transliterating SL English examples was agreed on when the professor was discussing semantic issues relevant to English specifically. For discussion of the specific semantic issues that arose from these examples, ISL was used.

### **Consultation with the Co-Interpreter**

The co-interpreter’s role was central to the successful interpretation of this module. Consultation between colleagues dealt with preassignment issues such as the preferred means of giving and receiving support from a colleague while on task and clarification of the best approaches to dealing with certain concepts in the target language. During the assignment, the co-interpreters monitored each other’s use of spatial referencing in order to ensure that information flow was maximally maintained across interpreter changes. Post-assignment consultation allowed for mutual feedback on performance during the session. The degree of trust between the interpreters meant that absolute honesty was possible, which in turn allowed for real sharing and professional growth.



Methods of support were governed by an understanding between the interpreters of how each one liked to receive support while on task. The interpreters took the opportunity to discuss how they would interpret each session, including dealing with more complex conceptual distinctions demanded by the subject matter. They brainstormed solutions to working around lexical gaps in the TL and—in consultation with the Deaf students—frequently reviewed their progress. The off-task interpreter also served as a monitor for the on-task interpreter. For example, the former would identify an unclear interpretation or one that was based on a misunderstanding by the on-task interpreter.

Example 6.

The on-task interpreter has misheard “bush” for “push” and therefore used the sign HEDGE. The off-task interpreter signaled to the on-task interpreter that she had misheard and offered her the appropriate sign or word instead.

Importantly, these levels of support are viable only where co-interpreters are comfortable in accepting direct on-task feedback from a colleague. Both interpreters and clients have to be aware that such support is not a criticism by the off-task interpreter and that the on-task interpreter must view the support as a successful collaboration toward the maximal transfer of information to the TL. Only when these conditions are met can co-interpreting of this kind be truly effective. Otherwise the danger exists that interpreters will view the assignment as a competition of some sort, in which each must outperform the other to avoid losing face at all costs, even to the extent that they may refuse to acknowledge errors or continue to work through segments that they do not understand in order to avoid having to seek clarification (see Gile, 1995 and Leeson, 2005a for further discussion of these issues with respect to spoken and signed language interpreters, respectively). In our opinion, this sort of reaction is detrimental and does nothing to improve collegiality and mutual respect between colleagues in the interpreting profession, nor does it improve the way in which both Deaf and non-Deaf clients perceive the interpreting profession as a whole.

Because one of the interpreters had a linguistics background, the clarification of register-specific terminology could be dealt with locally; that is, the interpreters could consult with each other in order to clarify the meaning of register-specific terms rather than having to seek ongoing input at this level from the professor. Thus, the interpreters shared their knowledge and understanding of particular linguistic concepts such as

those relevant to the field of pragmatics (e.g., implicature, Grice's maxims). This supports the idea that background knowledge of a subject enables interpreters to focus their attention on the production of the TL message since they do not have to struggle with the comprehension of meaning in the SL to the same degree, which would take processing attention away from the coordination and output of the TL message. Thus the distribution of effort (see Gile, 1995 and Leeson, 2005a) is geared more toward a deeper-level analysis of meaning (e.g., the functionality of the message, the relationship between segments of the message, the relative weighting given to a specific aspect of the discourse) and the production of the TL.

Feedback on performance was another facet of co-interpreting that worked well in this series of assignments. The off-task interpreter offered a critical appraisal of the on-task interpreter's performance, and this was then discussed at class break times and at the end of each session. Register, cohesion, TL equivalence (whether functional, dynamic, or literal), grammaticality and problematic issues were among the main issues the co-interpreters addressed. This peer review allowed for continual assessment of performance and directed focus to areas that needed further attention. It also created an environment of constructive dialogue that fostered sharing and learning between the interpreters. This degree of collaboration also demonstrates a high degree of involvement with the event, underpinned by notions of professionalism.

Another issue that demands attention in co-interpreting situations is the way in which the expectation to monitor one's co-interpreter's performance may affect the quality of performance over an extended period of time. The rationale for having two interpreters when an assignment is particularly complex or runs beyond a specific time frame is that quality is maintained longer with a rotation of interpreters (e.g., see Brennan & Brown, 1997). We therefore need to determine how the monitoring of a colleague (often in an intense manner) may in fact impede the co-interpreter's performance when that person's turn to interpret comes, given that the co-interpreter has been actively listening to the SL and assessing the TL output on the part of the colleague. In essence, the co-interpreter has been mentally carrying out the interpreting task, albeit with a lesser degree of effort.<sup>4</sup> We have not had an opportunity to look at this aspect of co-interpreting, but this area calls for empirical research.

## **DECISION MAKING IN SUCCESSFUL INTERPRETATION**

While linguistic classrooms make significant use of metalinguistic discussion, which influences interpreters' decisions in this context, decision making is a factor in *all* interpreting domains. Our awareness of the factors that prompt successful decision making for interpreters is not empirically based. Researchers must investigate the contextual factors that guide interpreters' decision making (e.g., what are they, what common questions specific contexts prompt, and what common strategies interpreters respond with). These may be culture- or language-specific (e.g., influenced by the participants' gender or age, regional variations, clients' familiarity regarding how to work with an interpreter).

## **PERSISTENCE OF THE INTERPRETER AS CONDUIT NOTION**

Interpreting texts discuss a host of models that influence interpreters (e.g., Mindess, 1999; Humphrey & Alcorn, 1996; Wilcox & Shaffer, 2005). However, it is the conduit model that persistently informs perceptions of what interpreters do (Wilcox & Shaffer, 2005; Allsop & Leeson, 2002). Wilcox and Shaffer (2005) note that our basic concept of communication as entailing the simple transfer of messages from one person to another is problematic. They also state that interpreters must become conscious of the fact that, while the conduit model is a powerful construction for explaining communication metaphorically, it is a too literal account of how communication occurs. Instead, communicators are involved in constructing meaning. Given this, viewing interpreting as the simple transfer of information from one language to another is problematic. Yet, as Allsop and Leeson (2002) have shown, the conduit model is pervasive, even among those who train signed language interpreters and even when they are aware of alternative approaches to framing and discussing the interpreter's task and role (e.g., the participant-interaction model, the bicultural model).

One of the clearest-cut problems occasioned by the embedded conduit model is that it creates expectations of interpreters as uninvolved mediators of messages. This contrasts with the reality of situations in which, as we have seen, interpreters are highly involved in the interpreting event—constructing meaning for themselves (on the basis of the SL

message) and then transferring this message to the TL. In these instances, their intentions are for their own comprehension to be in concert with the SL presenter's message and for the TL client to understand the message in the same way. This closely aligns with Hatim and Mason's (1990) suggestion that, by making assumptions about their audience, interpreters can make considered choices throughout their translation, leading them to make inferences about their cultural and linguistic understanding of the topic and transpose cultural meaning appropriately. However, it leads us very far away from Neumann-Solow's (1981) view of interpreter as an unobtrusive, passive conduit.

## **SUMMARY**

This chapter has outlined specific issues for interpreters in linguistics classrooms. We have pointed out the problem of lexical gaps and outlined several solutions. Most successful were the solutions that were formulated in consultation with Deaf students and co-interpreters. The co-interpretation relationship was central to the successful handling of this task. The analysis of the interaction between interpreters and other core participants clearly demonstrates that interpreters are not mere conduits, even in settings that are less interactive than those explored by others who have looked at the issue of interpreter neutrality, most notably Metzger (1999). We are not suggesting that class-based lectures are wholly uninteractive but rather that they are less interactive than the situations that Metzger (*ibid.*) and Wadensjö (1998) examined when investigating the notion of interpreters as participants in interpreted triads.

Interpreters interact with participants and build relationships over time. This necessarily affects the nature of the interaction by prompting familiarity, which to a degree exceeds the distance that a rigid interpretation of a demand for impartiality by a code of ethics might imply. Indeed, one of the Deaf students remarked that interpreters could not be expected to be machines and that, if they were, Deaf students would feel somewhat less engaged in the classroom interaction. For this student, "good interpreters" are those who interact with clients and are human rather than distant and cold.

In terms of further research, we suggest that successful interpretation needs to be systematically examined in order to derive an understand-

ing of the process that guides appropriate decision making and the view of these decisions when judged postperformance. Co-interpreting practices ought to be examined to identify good practice in such interactions, and benchmarked practices should be incorporated into training programs. Collaboration with Deaf clients must be promoted: This not only maximizes the interpreter's linguistic knowledge but, perhaps more importantly, establishes good working relationships, which serve to bring the Deaf community and the interpreting profession closer together. In the past decade, both groups in Ireland have advocated the latter outcome at almost every collaborative event that has made reference to interpreting. This issue of relative positionality is not unique to Ireland; the issue of how and why interpreters and the Deaf community have moved away from one another and on occasion been polarized is one that is also documented in the international literature, most notably in Cokely (2005).

In closing, we submit the following practical recommendations:

- Before the interpretation begins, discuss with the lecturer the importance of using visual aids when referring to examples and terminology.
- To enable maximum use of background knowledge, match the assignment to the interpreter's skills where possible.
- Because a team interpreting approach can work very efficiently, utilize it where possible. It will provide a positive learning environment and assist interpreters in developing both their knowledge and interpreting skills, especially in highly complex subjects.
- Develop a working relationship with your clients, and draw on their expertise as language users, whether of the spoken or the signed language of the interpreting domain.

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## NOTES

1. An earlier, shorter version of this chapter was presented at the Supporting Deaf People online conference in 2004.
2. Cognitive analyses of this phenomenon would allow for discussion of mental space theory (Fauconnier, 1985).
3. A literal interpretation is also referred to as formal equivalence; a free interpretation is also referred to as dynamic equivalence.
4. We thank Jim Kyle at Bristol University for his thoughts on this topic. Thanks also go to Anna-Lena Nilsson of Stockholm University for her willingness to debate this issue.

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