

NICODEMUS BRENDA / CAGLE KEITH (EDS) (2015) *SIGNED LANGUAGE INTERPRETATION AND TRANSLATION RESEARCH: SELECTED PAPERS FROM THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM*, (STUDIES IN INTERPRETATION SERIES, EDITED BY MELANIE METZGER AND EARL FLEETWOOD), WASHINGTON D.C., GALLAUDET UNIVERSITY PRESS, XII+250 PP. ISBN 978-156368-649-8.

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This eclectic set of papers has been brought together by the editors following the *First International Symposium on Signed Language Interpreting and Translation Research* held at Gallaudet University in Washington D.C., in March 2014 (see <http://www.gallaudet.edu/interpretation/department-of-interpretation-research/2014-international-research-symposium.html> for a video-summary and other details of the event). The efficient university press at this institution, widely known as a world-leading centre for Deaf and hard-of-hearing students, and the editors are to be congratulated for once again rapidly turning the wheels of the publication process to bring out this volume just a year later. It is the 13<sup>th</sup> volume in a series which has previously made a contribution to encouraging dialogue between interpreting researchers working with signed and with spoken languages. On this occasion, given the nature of the source conference, the ten selected papers only address interpreting that involves signed languages: between these covers one may find discussion of a range of topics, including the need for Deaf perspectives in interpretation research; discourse strategies and techniques that are unique to video relay call settings; the benefits of using sociology as a lens for examining sign language interpreting work; translating university entrance exams from written Portuguese into Libras (Brazilian Sign Language); the linguistic choices interpreters make when interpreting ASL figurative language into English; the nature of designated interpreting; and grammatical ambiguity in trilingual VRS (Video Relay Service) interpreting.

One of the collection's strengths is that it draws attention to a number of 'hot topics' in the field. Some of these will be familiar to scholars in the wider world of Interpreting Studies, since they are common to other environments and not exclusively of interest within the field of signed language interpreting. Others present a more narrow range of application, and it is one of these – the inclusion of the perspectives of Deaf people in signed language translation and interpreting research – which opens the volume in its first chapter. Eileen Forestal, who introduces herself as a Deaf person, now retired after 36 years as an educator of American Sign Language (ASL)-English interpreters, echoes an exhortation that is currently often evident as she “urge(s) hearing researchers to relinquish their power and work with Deaf researchers, including Deaf participants, and grant the Deaf community ownership, accountability, and shared responsibility” (p. 15). Although the notion of empowering Deaf people within research processes is not a new one (see, for example, Turner/Harrington 2000), it is arguably only with the increasing professionalization of Deaf interpreters and translators (Boudreault 2005; Turner 2006a; Stone 2009) that the real-world experiences of

Deaf people have been systematically allied to theoretical underpinnings which reveal new insights to the wider field.

Whilst the bulk of the volume consists of more traditional empirically-based studies, two other papers align with Forestal's contribution in pursuing different kinds of goals. In a theory-driven piece, Jeremy Brunson revisits his doctoral work ("The Practice and Organization of Sign Language Interpreting: An Institutional Ethnography of Access", Syracuse University 2008) to discuss the relevance of wider sociological theory to signed language interpreting. Elsewhere, Ronice Muller de Quadros, Janine Oliveira, Aline Nunes de Sousa and Roberto Dutra Vargas detail the linguistic and technical issues involved in translating the university entrance examination for the Federal University of Santa Catarina, Brazil, from Portuguese into the national signed language, Libras. This is clearly a matter of immediate practical consequence to Deaf people's educational experiences in this context, and reminds us that interpreting changes lives, for better or worse.

The remaining papers range from those of the more narrowly empirical variety, concentrating primarily on linguistic description, through those which more actively seek to connect language and social consequences, to those with an eye on wider theoretical modelling. Picking up another of the field's most prominent current developments, two papers centre upon the introduction of VRS interpreting using signed languages. Introduced in Sweden in 1997 (Hellström 1998), VRS has grown in significance with the spread of enhanced digital technologies, alongside similar growth in videoconference interpreting between spoken languages following experiments back in the 1970s (Mouzourakis 1996; Braun 2015). In this volume, Annie Marks' paper, deriving from her Gallaudet University Master's dissertation, examines interpreters' management of discourse in VRS settings. Since recording actual VRS interaction is strictly prohibited in the United States, Marks takes her 81 minutes of data from three simulated calls, and returns to the familiar territory of footing shifts marked out by Metzger (1995) to map out the practices she observes. In the same (mock) setting, David Quinto-Pozos, Erica Alley, Kristie Casanova de Canales and Rafael Treviño take a quasi-experimental approach to investigating interpreters' strategies for handling material that the researchers consider ambiguous in the source language. The results are held to show, not unexpectedly, that "lexical choices made by interpreters involve careful consideration of context, interpersonal dynamics between speakers and addressees, and sociocultural norms of communication" (p. 232). In another study emerging from the campus of Gallaudet University, Roberto Santiago, Lisa Barrick and Rebecca Jennings sought to discover whether, under 'laboratory' conditions, interpreters would use figurative language in rendering into English a heavily idiomatic ASL source text. Follow-up interviews – asking whether the six participants used idioms in everyday interactions, and felt this affected their interpreting; what factors influenced their decisions to use idioms; and whether using idioms in their ASL-English work was a risk – explored the relative lack of idiomaticity in the English renditions.

Fieldwork of a different kind underpins two papers which centre particularly on an emerging seam of questions relating to questions of identity management

in relationships between signed language interpreters and those with whom they work. Identity issues abound in sign language studies (see overview in Napier/Leeson 2016) and in interpreting more particularly (Harrington/Turner 2001, Turner 2005), but the papers offered here are indicative of a contemporary shift arising in the context of improved access to employment for Deaf people. The history of ‘institutionalised audism’ (Turner 2006b) that previously undermined Deaf employees’ chances of professional advancement has been steadily overturned in many countries, not least as a consequence of the provision of workplace interpreting (Dickinson/Turner 2008; Hauser *et al.* 2008; Dickinson/Turner 2009; Dickinson 2010). Here, from another master’s dissertation (rooted informatively in traditions of linguistic anthropology with much to offer to Interpreting Studies), Stephanie Feyne attends to audience perceptions of Deaf professionals, showing that – in the unusual setting of museum talks delivered by Deaf ASL users – addressees “attributed almost all interpreted utterances to the Deaf originators” (p. 67), not recognising the influence of the interpreter’s individuality on the message as conveyed to them. Annette Miner’s interview data is taken from a pilot study with two Deaf academics and five interpreters (three of whom worked with those Deaf people). Miner contrasts these perspectives and concludes that whilst Deaf professionals regarded their regular interpreters “as a cook might regard a favourite knife”, the interpreters thought of themselves “as a key ingredient in the dish, not just as a tool used in creating it” (p. 208). The difference is revealing, and certainly suggests a need for much deeper exploration of the topic.

The remaining two chapters perhaps reach most explicitly for the nurturing of wider scholarly impact from empirical roots. Campbell McDermid continues, after two decades as an educator and three as a practitioner in the field (notes on contributors would have helped readers by providing such background details), to seek to use insights from ASL-English interpreting to answer bigger questions about how best to model the linguistic, social and cognitive processes enacted and revealed by the quest to optimise the management of meaning in this context. In this study, McDermid asked 12 novice and expert practitioners to interpret an English monologue into ASL: he concludes that they “felt the need to disambiguate approximately 50% of their target text utterances in order to achieve a comprehensible story for a Deaf audience” (p. 125) and argues firmly that this lends credence to cognitive, constructivist models of interpreting. In another window on interpreters as *collaborative* constructors of meaning, Silvia Del Vecchio, Marcello Cardarelli, Fabiana De Simone and Giulia Petitta investigate what happens when interpreters are directly addressed by, and respond to, other participants. Their focus is on “perceptions of the interpreter’s role by the interlocutors and the effects on the interpreting effectiveness” (p. 25). This is a welcome contribution to the slow-burning development of post-conduit modelling in Interpreting Studies: the idea of the interpreter as a ‘participant’ in a ‘pas de trois’ who ‘co-constructs’ meaning along with others in interaction have been with us for some time (Roy 1989; Wadensjö 1992 and Turner 1995 respectively), but we have collectively taken our time in developing practices in the field which actively enable all participants to share responsibility for the effectiveness

of interpreted interaction (Turner 2006c, Turner 2007) and in expanding thinking on both describing and theorising the outcomes (Turner/Merrison 2016). As Del Vecchio and the other authors succinctly state, active engagement of primary participants serves to “improve the interpreting process and can be defined as cotranslation because – whether they are asked to or not – participants contribute to the work of the interpreter. However, the actual improvement of the translation process must be further investigated in this perspective, in order to clarify its implications” (p. 41).

Whilst containing certain insights, this volume also underlines some shortcomings in the field. Too often, it continues a familiar lack of connectivity within the relatively small academic community. With notable exceptions, few of the papers here are deeply underpinned by a sense of either the history or the broad geography of scholarship in signed language interpreting studies, and even fewer display substantial attention to the wider disciplinary roots from which they are, in fact, drawing, and – equally importantly – which they should be feeding in turn. The result is that we see claims such as Jeremy Brunson’s (p. 145) that “an ontology that situates the everyday of interpreters in a larger context” has been “missing from Interpreting Studies scholarship for some time”. In entry after entry, Franz Pöchhacker’s 552-page *Routledge Encyclopedia of Interpreting Studies* (2015) is just the latest of innumerable outputs that make a nonsense of such a statement. It is hard to upbraid spoken language researchers for not seeing the value in signed language work if the evidence of volumes like this suggests that the practice is frequently mutual. A stronger editorial hand might have insisted, too, that contributors considered the contribution their ideas might make to the non-signing majority in the Interpreting Studies field: Deaf researchers like Eileen Forestal should not, for example, imagine that they are the only members of minority groups who may have more to offer to the generation of knowledge than has hitherto often been acknowledged, and these connections are there to be made to the benefit of all.

For these reasons and others, readers may find it hard to ‘place’ this volume on their academic shelves. It is, perhaps, revealing to consider why the organisers of the original conference from which these papers were plucked decided to call it the *First International Symposium on Signed Language Interpreting and Translation Research*. After all, conferences on signed language interpreting have been running in the United States for half a century. And signed language interpreting research has been presented at international academic events for a very long time, too – the first such event I attended was at Durham University in England in 1994, for instance. Should one conclude that the message between the lines is that the American field was largely unaware of what was happening in Europe at that pre-internet time? And that the legacy of a literature that was largely produced by and for practitioners (predominantly disseminated through the US Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, established in 1964) and trainers (US Conference of Interpreter Trainers, from 1979) is evident in this ‘first’ symposium to put research centre stage?

Part of what this book demonstrates, anyway, is that whilst the broader Interpreting Studies is expanding, it is also inevitably getting to be somewhat ‘bag-

gy' (synonyms: loose-fitting, roomy, generously cut, voluminous, billowing). In part, that's a reflection of its dynamism and a welcome diversity of approaches. But it's also a consequence of the approach we collectively take to the circulation of ideas, which tends towards 'letting a thousand flowers bloom': encourage everything, and time will tell what persists. Publications like *The Interpreters' Newsletter*, though, could perhaps be the place to cultivate a slightly more managed form of gardening, one which takes a pro-active approach to the generation of coherence by fostering *continuity* within promising lines of enquiry, and direct *exchange* among groups of researchers engaged in analysing related topics. This might mean promoting intensive *workshops*, for example, which allow at least as much time for interaction and exploration of ideas as for the initial presentations that are the meat-and-drink of most conference programmes (including the event that sparked the present volume). Likewise, academic journals in more venerable fields than our own (philosophy; medicine) sometimes offer scope for *Letters to the Editor*, creating space for response and counter-argument on the scholarly issues of the day. As an historic crossroads for many forms of transaction, where better than Trieste, home city of *The Interpreters' Newsletter*, to look again at such possibilities?

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