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## What is a Faithful Interpretation?

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### Abstract

Fidelity to the source message for both spoken language and sign language interpreters has been at the core of our conception of the role of the interpreter. This article presents a selection of research and reflections on the theme of the *faithful* interpretation in an effort to bring this research to the attention of the practicing interpreter. It includes brief sections on the history of conference interpreting and community interpreting, the professionalization of interpreting, models of the interpreter's role, consumer expectations of interpreting services, the unique situation of sign language interpreters in regard to transliteration, and the measurements applied to fidelity in interpreting.

### Faithful Interpretation Defined

One of the tenets of our profession is that we should interpret *faithfully* from source language to target language. This has been understood to mean that we should not interject our opinions, nor should we add or subtract *anything* from the message. But what exactly *is* a *faithful* interpretation? To what, or to whom, are we to be faithful? We know of course that interpretation is very rarely literal, i.e., word-for-word or word-for-sign. We know from long experience that we interpret meaning rather than words because we expect the people for whom we are interpreting to understand each other. But how literal or how free can we be in interpreting the meaning? How much adding, subtracting, or explaining is still faithful to the message and/or to the speaker? The tenet of fidelity (completeness and accuracy) in interpreting goes straight to the heart of our role and our vision of what it means to be an interpreter. No one pretends to be able to answer these questions definitively, even for a given situation, but the fact that we are still struggling with such questions is a reminder that our work is extremely complex and requires constant self-monitoring to be as accurate and fair as possible while accommodating the consumers' needs. Conceptions about the role and responsibilities of interpreters are evolving among interpreters. This article will explore the history of interpreting and some of the research on the role and function of the interpreter (in both spoken languages and signed languages).

### Historical Background: From Helpers to Professionals

Interpreting between languages was an informal affair: someone who knew two languages (more or less) was asked, sometimes even employed, to act as an interpreter (or, as the situation warranted, a guide, messenger, negotiator, or even spy). At times, interpreting occurred on a high level, such as in meetings of political or business leaders, military campaigns, treaty negotiations, or international conferences. More often, it simply occurred as *natural interpreting* or *lay interpreting* between interlocutors who enlisted bilingual friends or family to help relay messages for them. It was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that interpreting was accorded the status of a profession in the sense of an occupation requiring specialized training, knowledge, and skills, when professional interpreter associations of licensed or accredited practitioners who consciously adopted codes of ethics or codes of good practice finally appeared.

### Conference Interpreting

The modern profession of interpreting was born during the 1919 peace treaty negotiations following the "Great War" in Europe and during the early meetings of the League of Nations. The need for interpreters increased as the communication needs of international politics and global trade expanded. Professional interpreting schools were founded as early as the 1930s to fill the growing need for interpreters in business and diplomacy. As interpreting became professionalized, interpreters at the League of Nations and then at the United Nations (UN) became the paradigm for the public's

conception of interpreters in general. Conference interpreters worked in the consecutive mode; that is, they would wait until the speaker finished his speech before rendering the interpretation. In the international bodies, the interpreters took notes during the speeches (which could run as much as an hour or more) and then took the speaker's place *at the podium* to deliver a consecutive interpretation of the entire speech. Their work was highly visible and prestigious.

Simultaneous interpreting, made possible by the introduction of headsets and microphones after World War II, proved its efficacy at the Nuremberg trials and, despite some resistance from the entrenched consecutive interpreters at the UN, eventually became the *modus operandi* for interpreting at UN meetings and other formal conferences of diplomats and business leaders (Baigorri-Jalón, 2005). Conference interpreters had gained enormous cachet by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and were paid commensurate with their professional status.

As the market for professional conference interpreters grew for both diplomacy and trade, professional associations were established. The *Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs* (FIT) and the *Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence* (AIIC) were established in 1953. AIIC promulgated a code of ethics and professional standards in 1957, and still plays a significant role in the training and employment of high-level conference interpreters today. Interestingly, though it emphasizes professional confidentiality and working conditions, it remains conspicuously silent about the role of the interpreter and the question of accuracy of the interpretation (the current full text of the Code can be seen on the AIIC website, [www.aiic.net](http://www.aiic.net)). However, in a survey of users of interpreting services at meetings and conferences interpreted by AIIC members in 1996, researcher Moser (1996) found that consumers considered fidelity to be the most important criterion for a good interpretation. Out of the 201 participants interviewed by Moser, "faithfulness to the original" was cited as the first duty of the professional conference interpreter.

### Community Interpreting

While high level conference interpreting may be the image triggered in the public's mind when one speaks of professional interpreters, most of the interpreting in the world today is done by *community interpreters*, often with little or no special training, who typically interpret for friends, family or fellow members of a minority language community who are not fluent in the majority language and who need help in dealing with institutions, schools, and government agencies. Community interpreters (sometimes called *liaison* or dialogue interpreters as opposed to the monologic interpreters working in conferences) are bilinguals who typically have grown up in the minority community and also understand the language and culture of the majority. Recognition and remuneration has come more slowly for community interpreters than for conference interpreters, and in fact some community interpreters are not paid at all for their work. Even today, many community interpreters who work in legal, health, social service, and other community-oriented settings, as well as in war zones, are not considered professionals. The pioneering countries in the movement to recognize, train, and compensate community interpreters in the 20<sup>th</sup> century were Australia, Sweden, and the United States.

In the US in the 1970s, federal laws began mandating services for the vocational rehabilitation of "the handicapped," including improving education and job opportunities for deaf people, thanks in part to Boyce Williams, the highest-ranking deaf person in the federal government at the time. Federal monies funded the National Interpreter Training Consortium pilot interpreter training programs in 1973, and within a decade of its establishment in 1964, the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) promulgated a Code of Ethics for ASL interpreters, which mandated not only confidentiality and conduct befitting a professional, but also fidelity of interpretation. The original RID Code of Ethics had a great influence on other countries' subsequent sign language interpreter associations' codes of ethics or codes of good practice.

While professional ASL interpreters are becoming ever more organized, community interpreters working between spoken languages in this country's immigrant communities continue to struggle. The relations between signed and spoken language community interpreters are closer in the pioneering countries of Australia and Sweden, where the development of spoken and signed language interpreters has evolved in tandem. In Australia, anti-discrimination laws mandating access of services (social, educational, and medical) to Aboriginal peoples, linguistic minorities, and immigrants began passing in the 1970s. In 1977, the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI)

was established to evaluate levels of competence of community interpreters for both spoken and signed languages. In Sweden by the mid-1970s, local governments were routinely hiring interpreters for both spoken and signed languages in medical, legal, religious, and educational settings, and interpreter training programs were established in adult education centers. These developments in Australia and Sweden, and the increased market for interpreting services that followed, began to have an impact on the public's recognition of interpreters who had been serving minority communities, including deaf people. Employed either by the government or working as free-lancers, community interpreters working in institutions (hospitals, social security offices, courts, etc.) have been recognized and even often been considered *advocates* or *cultural brokers* who go beyond the traditional neutral role of the interpreter (Roberts, 1997). There is a basic and significant difference between the American system and the Australian and Swedish systems: RID *itself* develops and administers the tests and certification system for the accreditation of sign language interpreters in the US, whereas in Australia and Sweden, an independent agency supported by the federal government tests all interpreters nationwide, both spoken and signed language interpreters.

The growing interest in community interpreting in the field of both spoken and signed languages led to the 1995 *First International Conference on Interpreting in Legal, Health, and Social Service Settings* at Geneva Park near Toronto, Canada. The conference title, "Critical Link" evolved into a series of Critical Link conferences: Vancouver (1998), Montreal (2001), Stockholm (2004), Sydney (2007) and Birmingham, UK (2010). From the beginning, these conferences included signed and spoken language interpreters.

### **The Professionalization/Academization of Signed Language (SL) Interpreting**

SL interpreters before the 1970s were bilinguals who were members of the Deaf community, either because their families or friends were deaf, or because they worked with deaf people as educators, social workers, or religious interpreters. Because there were no tests of professional competence for SL interpreters, members of the Deaf community would simply ask those hearing people around them who were fluent in SL and who had demonstrated their trustworthiness to interpret for them (Cokely, 2005). Since interpreters were almost never paid for these services, community interpreting was not recognized as a job, much less a profession, either by society or by the interpreters themselves. Interpreting "was a way of contributing to the general welfare of deaf people...we felt it was our duty to do it, and if we did not do it, the deaf person would suffer and we would feel responsible" (Fant, 1990, p. 10).

Given SL interpreters' roots in the Deaf community and the interactive natural learning of the language from constant contact with deaf friends or family (rather than from academic courses), it is not surprising that the early pioneers in our field conceived of interpreting as *helping people understand each other* rather than simply translating the words or signs. They naturally interpreted linguistic *and* social meaning. They advocated for deaf people because they knew intimately the potential catastrophes awaiting powerless minorities who struggled to understand "the system" and whose intentions were often foiled as a result of gross misunderstandings.

For the SL interpreter, being faithful meant making sure, as far as possible, that deaf and hearing people could understand and get along with each other. To that end, certain assumptions about the mainstream social system (social services, schools, hospitals, courts, etc.) had to be *explained* to deaf people, and certain norms in the Deaf community (expectations of reciprocity, use of interpreters, conversational rules regarding eye gaze ("If you are not looking at him, he assumes that you're not listening!") had to be clarified for hearing people. Cultural differences had to be smoothed over to allow for successful communication. That which was implicit in either language often had to be made explicit in the other language for the interlocutors to understand each other. Moreover, certain things would simply be too time-consuming to explain or too irritating to one or the other and could very properly be *left out* in order for the interpreted conversation to reach a conclusion satisfactory to both parties. A "faithful" interpretation, then, was the result of being faithful to the goals and values of the community: being helpful to people who were trying to communicate. The appearances of Lillian Beard, one of the founders of RID, at the San Antonio and Philadelphia RID conferences in 2005 and 2009 were touching reminders of our roots of faithfulness to the community's values.

By the 1970s, interpreting services began to be legally mandated and interpreters began to

be paid. As a result, instead of interpreters being directly invited by deaf people to help out in the Deaf community, the accreditation of interpreters began to be a product of government licensing or university degrees. Interpreter education programs in universities or training centers in non-profit associations were created to meet the demand for interpreters. Interpreters began to consider themselves professionals. As the legal mandates for interpreting services in countries like the US, Sweden, the UK, and Australia spread, the demand for SL interpreting services blossomed, and the public, too, began to consider interpreters as professionals.

Unfortunately, there were not enough candidates already fluent in SL to fill the new interpreting classes offered in interpreter education programs. The students who wanted to become interpreters had to learn the language while mastering the theory and mechanics of the interpreting process in an impossibly short period of time (some training programs were once-a-week night classes; university programs included some night programs and some full-time programs from two to four years in length). Becoming fluent in a new language is hard enough to achieve in a few years, but learning the language *and* mastering the skills of interpreting in that short time period was a real challenge. Upon graduating from a university with an interpreting degree, students were too often surprised to find that they were ill-prepared to practice the profession (Marschark, Sapere, Convertino, & Seewagen, 2005; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005). Having been often ignored or maltreated by *professionals* throughout their history, one can understand how some deaf people were unhappy that many of these new interpreters were now too detached from the Deaf community.

In spite of such problems, the professionalization of community ASL interpreting has yielded many positive results. The public has realized the need for professional interpreters, and deaf people are beginning to demand that their interpreters act professionally. And one of the most important aspects of this professionalization and academization is that the recognition of the profession is leading to increased *research* into exactly what we do, how we ought to be doing it, and how we ought to be training the next generation of interpreters. The last 40 years have seen a beginning of research on sign language, including some ground-breaking studies about sign language interpreting, but this is a relatively short time for scientific inquiry into a field, especially one so complex. The cross-fertilization of research in both community interpreting and conference interpreting and across both signed and spoken languages are enormously healthy for the field.

### Faithfulness as Part of the Interpreter's Role

Rendering an equivalent message traditionally has been considered a purely linguistic activity: the interpreter understands the source language message and translates it into the same message expressed in the target language. The *information content* is identical. Fidelity, then, is usually portrayed as an ideal where the quality of interpreting can be analyzed by the number of deviations from the source message (omissions, additions, or substitutions). Given the context, speed, register, intent, and emotional effect of the original, the interpretation should be the virtually the same. The source message is sacred.

Herbert (1952) affirmed the tenet of “fully and faithfully” interpreting a speaker’s original idea (p. 4). He noted that a faithful interpretation in consecutive mode need not take as much time as the original. By speaking a bit faster, avoiding repetitions, hesitations, and redundancies, the interpreter could reduce the original speaker’s time in a consecutive interpretation by about 25% and still be interpreting “faithfully.” (p.67) Seleskovitch (1968), one of the co-founders of AIIC, called for the interpreter to work with “*fidélité absolue*,” translated in the 1978 English version as “total accuracy.” Seleskovitch was a self-taught conference interpreter who began teaching interpreting in the 1950s. She was the founder of the early and influential “Paris school” of conference interpreting centered around her *Ecole Supérieure d’Interprètes et de Traducteurs* (ESIT) in Paris. She taught that *absolute fidelity* could be achieved only through interpretation of meaning (*la théorie de sens*) rather than a mere literal *transcoding* of words. Her *theory of meaning* assumed that once the interpreter understood the source message, he or she would parse the meaning into *de-verbalized* chunks, jettisoning the linguistic form of the original message, so that the pure meaning, determined by the source utterance in conjunction with the interpreter’s knowledge of the context of the particular situation and her general world knowledge, would yield a totally accurate interpretation in the target language. *Faithful*,



for Seleskovitch, never passes through a literal translation. Her *théorie de sens* gained momentum in the ASL interpreting community when she was invited as the keynote speaker for the RID conference in 1991.

As long as the original message is synthesized accurately, all of the words need not be expressed in a faithful interpreted rendition. Chernov, a Russian researcher and interpreter at the UN, wrote about *compression* or *omissions* in the interpreted version as a result of processing dense content at high speeds (1994). Viaggio (1991, p. 51) argued that “saying it all” was not always necessary to “convey all of the sense [meaning]” (Dam, 1993; Isham, 1994). Indeed, some writers have argued that, depending on the language pair involved, “what needs to be said or remain unstated depends on the language and culture in question” (Pöschhacker, 2004, p. 135). In other words, what is explicit in one language may be rendered implicit in the other in a *condensed* or *reduced* form, and conversely, what is implicit in one language community may need to be made explicit in another, resulting in an *expanded* version.<sup>1</sup>

Gile (1992), who first coined the term *interpreting studies* for a field of study separate from *translation studies*<sup>2</sup> (in 1 at the Translation Congress in Vienna), added that the interpretation should be faithful to the original both in “message and style” (p. 189). Though he gives priority to the informational content, Gile affirmed that the form of the target language product should nevertheless be natural and native-like. Notice that the implication of style in Gile’s usage is a native language style rather than the personal style of the particular speaker. Like Herbert, he is little interested in the repetitions, hesitations, and redundancies of the original. Harris (1990) invoked the paradigm of the “honest spokesperson” as a standard for faithfulness. In his view, the interpreter, as the speaker’s representative, should “re-express the original speaker’s ideas and the manner of expressing them as accurately as possible and without significant omissions” (p. 118). The honest spokesperson role stresses the fact that the interpreter, imperfect but trustworthy, can still be relied upon to render a faithful interpretation and takes some of the pressure off the interpreter who will almost certainly make some mistakes in the real world.

### Target or Interactional Orientation

By the 1980s, the work of scholars and researchers began to shift from the study of the interpreter’s *cognitive processing* (how the interpreter translates from source to target language, producing a target message equivalent to the source) to a more *functional* approach (Kirchhoff, 2002; Shlesinger, 1989; Stenzl, 1989; Vermeer, 2000). The function, or purpose, of the text or the message was justifiably more important than the traditional belief that fidelity to the source message was the unique goal of all translation. In other words, the target message should serve the same purpose for the audience as the original message, considering “interpretation in the context of the entire communication process from speaker through the interpreter to the receiver” (Stenzl, 1989, p. 24).

As early as 1976, the American sociologist Anderson noted that spoken language interpreters agreed that only a small percentage of their work was conference interpreting, and that their typical community assignment primarily consisted of three people: two primary participants (an authority from the majority culture – such as a doctor, social worker, or government employee – and a member of a linguistic minority seeking services) plus an interpreter. Most interpreting events, therefore, consist of a social interaction between participants of different status, each playing a prescribed social role. He also noted that the interpreter, as the sole bilingual in the triad, had at least some power over the flow and even the outcome of the interaction. The interactional perspective became highly influential in determining the model of how the interpreter in the community functions and pointed the way to an expanded view of the question of fidelity. From the conception of a purely linguistic activity in which informational content is conveyed from one language to another, the interpreter’s role has evolved into the more complex task of juggling the goals and intent of participants from two different cultures under the pressures of time and environment.

<sup>1</sup> Advocates of “free interpretation” would argue that the terms “reduced” or “expanded” are unnecessarily negative, that such adaptations are in fact necessary for a faithful interpretation.

<sup>2</sup> Translation as a generic term has been used to include both written translations and oral (or signed) interpretations. Common usage in the field now separates *translation* (written or, in the case of signed languages, filmed) and *interpretation* (oral or signed, and interpreted either simultaneously or consecutively for the target audience in attendance). In the process of *translating*, source texts may be re-read (or re-played) and will be read (or seen) by audiences at a later date. *Interpreters*, on the other hand, work from a real-time source language message and the target interpretation is produced live under time pressure for immediate use by the target audience.

### Models of the Interpreter's Role

Since the 1970s, there have been several models in a continuing evolution of the research on this question. These models assumed certain norms which informed the interpreter's behavior. Both conference and community interpreters have traditionally been seen as neutral conduits, or machines. Although their task may be complicated, especially in simultaneous interpreting, by the speed of delivery, the density of the text, and/or the pressures of the environment, they generally are expected not to intervene or manage the flow of talk. The ideal of the neutral interpreter became widespread, described metaphorically as "interpreter-as-window," "interpreter-as-phone-connection," or interpreter as "machine" (Pöchhacker, 2004). In many community situations, especially in courts, interpreters often hear the admonition, "*Just interpret what I say!*" The expectation is that the interpreter should be a neutral conduit for the source message to pass to the target language, and that only the primary participants in the exchange have the power to construct or manipulate that message. The interpreter-as-machine stands in stark contrast to the original role of interpreters as highly involved participants (helpers, intermediaries, negotiators, and guides). SL interpreters, friends, and family of immigrant communities who served as *natural* interpreters before the 1970s, saw their role as anything but neutral conduits. They were personally invested in the outcome of the exchange; they were there to *help*.

Between the passive conduit or machine (for the most part, humanly impossible) and the involved helper, other roles have been widely discussed in the interpreting community. In the SL interpreting community, the model of *communication facilitator* was widespread by the 1980s (Caccamise, 1980), a model which accorded the interpreter an active role in managing the conversation. The concept of cultural mediator or advocate was also proposed for South African spoken language interpreters (Drennan & Swartz, 1999) in a movement of advocating for patients' rights (the term *cultural mediator* was also widespread in the SL interpreting community). Laster and Taylor (1994) and Mikkelsen (1998) have argued for the interpreter to take an active role in helping to ensure the rights of minority clients confronted with powerful unfamiliar institutions, especially the judicial system. Barsky (1996) argued that refugees entering Canada needed interpreters to serve as *intercultural agents* in order to empower the refugees. Redressing power imbalances was also a major topic in the ASL interpreting community in the 1990s (Baker-Shenk, 1991). These newer models incorporated a more active role for interpreters, highlighting the need for "smoothing over cultural differences," "bridging cultural gaps" and "serving not only as linguistic but also cultural mediators" (Kondo & Tebble, 1997). While the mediator or advocate role came naturally for many of the true bilinguals who served their minority communities in both spoken and signed languages, the majority of hearing interpreters who learned SL as adults found that taking on the role of cultural mediator could be more than they can handle. Novice interpreters who did not grow up in the community and culture, even those who have graduated from a four-year interpreting education program, should be particularly cautious in taking on such a responsibility. Cultural mediation is a responsibility that requires a thorough understanding of both cultures, requiring many years of experience in both.

Models or metaphors for the interpreter's role can be helpful, but they are often theoretical ideals that prescribe a certain role for the interpreter. Experienced community interpreters may, in fact, switch models in the middle of an assignment, depending on the circumstances and the expectations of the consumers. In determining what the interpreter *should* do, it is preferable to study and describe what the really good interpreters *actually* do, and begin to base our conceptions of the role and tasks of the interpreters on such descriptions.

### Interpreting as a Discourse Process

Until the 1990s, most of the academic research on translating centered on the cognitive processes of interpreters and the study of translating texts or monologic speech rather than dialogues or interactive social situations. The complications of dialogic conversations (overlapping speech, awkwardness in turn-taking, interpersonal conflicts, and difference in status of the speakers) were rarely taken into consideration. With the rise of the field of socio-linguistics, however, the view of interpreting as a purely linguistic event began to change. The focus on interpreting as mediated discourse was influenced by the work of Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974). Their research investigated the structure of

direct (rather than interpreted) conversations that require the participants take turns. A turn can be introducing a new topic, contributing or questioning an idea, changing the subject (for any number of reasons), or simply a comment to keep the conversation moving forward. The work in categorizing types of turns, silences, and overlapping talk laid the foundation for examination of how interpreters deal with such complexities in interpreted conversations. This type of conversational analysis provides the researcher with concrete points of inquiry to compare how interpreters mediate between the differing and sometimes conflicting conversational norms of participants from different language communities.

Gumperz (1982) coined the term *interactional sociolinguistics* and showed that participants in a conversation engage in an on-going process of listening to assess the intentions of their interlocutor in order to formulate a response to accomplish their own intentions. What a person means must be determined not only by linguistic output (what is said) but also by knowledge of the expectations, social roles, and worldview of the listener. Tannen (1984) proposed that speakers with different conventions for signaling meaning have different conversational styles, and these differences can cause significant misunderstandings not only between speakers of different language communities, but also between speakers of the same country with different characteristics such as class, gender, race, and age. Like Gumperz, Tannen's method consisted of recording naturally occurring conversations, identifying problems in communication, then analyzing how the participants felt about each moment of dialogue with input not only from the participants but also from outside observers familiar with one or another of the conversational styles.

### **The Impact of Socio-Linguistics on Community Interpreters**

Berk-Seligson's (1990) study of English/Spanish interpreters in US courtrooms analyzed the actual performance of interpreters gleaned from hundreds of hours of recorded data. She found that interpreters were in fact active participants in the proceedings, requesting clarification, asking witnesses or lawyers to repeat a statement, clarifying ambiguities, asking for permission to speak to the court to report grammatical problems or difficulty with dialects, etc. In addition, she found that interpreters even managed the testimony by asking witnesses if they understood or by prompting them to answer. Wadensjö's (1992, 1998) studies from a large database of audio recordings of Russian/Swedish interpreted situations in Swedish health care clinics and police stations were grounded in Goffman's (1981) work on the roles of speakers in face-to-face interaction and have been influential in both spoken and signed language interpreting communities. She posited that what the interpreter actually says or does in the course of the interpretation can be described as either translating (relaying the message) or coordinating the interaction (or more precisely, co-coordinating the flow of talk *with* the participants). Interpreters, in other words, are working with the participants to accomplish their goals in the interaction, such as (a) helping them project the image of themselves which they think will further their intentions in the situation given the social roles of the participants, (b) relaying the information that will help each assess the other's intentions, (c) orchestrating the turn-taking of the interaction, and even (d) deleting utterances which may violate social roles or expectations. Tannen and Wadensjö's work in the hearing world has been applied to the world of SL interpreting. Roy's (2000) study of a short, interpreted meeting between a hearing professor and a deaf student analyzed participant perceptions about each moment of dialogue. She analyzed regular turns (those with smooth transitions which *felt* like the participants were talking directly to each other without an interpreter), turns with an appropriate lag time, turns with what was perceived as a long lag time, preventing or ignoring a turn, and overlapping talk. She also noted when the interpreter initiated a turn in order to manage the flow of conversation, when the interpreter prompted a participant to take a turn, and when the interpreter yielded a turn to the more powerful participant (the professor) in order to further the goals of the encounter for both participants. Although there is a widespread assumption that the participants in an interpreted event are talking directly to each other, and although they sometimes feel that they are, Roy concluded that each participant is in fact exchanging turns *with the interpreter* in accordance with the norms of their own language. "Both speakers nod their heads, smile and silently laugh...at moments that co-occur with utterances they understand in their own languages" (p. 72), and "phenomena around turns, such as pauses, lags, overlapping talk, and simultaneous turns, are going to occur naturally and as they are created by all three participants (p. 68)." She concluded that



turns taken by the interpreter were often a combination of the interpreter's decisions and the primary speaker's tacit agreement to accept those decisions.

Metzger's (1995) study of a pediatric examination interpreted between English and ASL showed that fully 8% of the professional interpreter's total talk during the examination was *not* relaying the talk of either of the primary participants. Most of this interpreter-initiated talk was either directed at the deaf participant or requests for clarification directed to either the hearing or deaf person. Metzger (1999) concluded that it was unrealistic to expect the interpreter to remain completely neutral. Like the participants, interpreters have their own *frames of reference*, which have been shaped by their own life experiences. The act of interpreting is inherently an act of making choices as to what the speaker's utterance means to the speaker, to the interpreter-intermediary, and what it might mean to the listener. It is clear that this perspective of interpreting as a discourse process among people in the real world, rather than as a purely linguistic activity, influences our view of a faithful interpretation.

### Expectations of Users of Interpreting Services

Consumers' expectations vary depending on the situation and on their conception of the process of interpreting. Between the idea of an interpreter as a machine, which may be only an illusion, but is nevertheless still widespread, and the conception of an interpreter as helper or ally, we find models of the interpreter as faithful conveyor of meaning and *honest spokesperson*, who may smooth over cultural differences, correct speaker errors, eliminate repetitions or extraneous information, and help navigate awkward moments. Surveys of users of spoken language interpreting services have attempted to determine consumer expectations for settings as diverse as community health centers in South Africa (Drennan & Swartz, 1999), health care workers in Austria (Pöchhacker, 2000), formal conferences (Kopczynski, 1994; Moser 1996), and community service providers in Canada (Mesa, 2000). In general, these consumers reported that they expect less cultural mediation and interpreter intrusion than the interpreters themselves report that they actually do, but interviewees' answers, interestingly, depend on who is being surveyed and in what setting. Kurz (1989, 2002) found that delegates at a medical conference, engineers, and diplomats differed in their expectations of conference interpreters depending on their professions. Users of interpreting services provided by AICC interpreters (Moser, 1996) responded that *faithfulness to the original* was the first duty of the professional conference interpreter (45%), followed by fluency and clarity of delivery (34%). More experienced conference-goers were even more exigent: 53% of the experienced users demanded fidelity compared to 35% of the less-experienced delegates. Other qualities of a good interpretation mentioned in the interviews included synchronicity (avoiding extended lag times), rhetorical skills, and voice quality, though expectations varied greatly depending on the meeting type, age, gender, and responder's experience.

In contrast to the surveys conducted in conference settings, Edwards, Temple, and Alexander (2005) studied the expectations of users of community interpreting services. They found that members of minority communities using interpreters for social services noted *personal character* and *trust* as the qualities of a good interpreter, ahead of linguistic competence or fidelity. This predilection often leads to the utilization of family members or friends for interpreting. Most consumers of interpreting services in the community setting are less concerned with exact expressions in their interlocutor's language and more concerned with the fluency and flow of conversation. Such consumers expect a freer interpretation: the interpreter is expected to mediate the interchange, to make all the cultural adjustments necessary, so that no time is lost in needless confusion or misunderstanding. Conversational strategies that are perfectly appropriate in one culture but might be face-threatening or awkward in the interpreted situation can be adapted by the interpreter to the circumstances, permitting the participants to comfortably get on with achieving their goals. When the goals of the participants include cooperation and efficiency, the interpreter's fidelity to their intentions will include tasks that are not strictly linguistic renderings.

There are certainly times when consumers want, or at least say they want, literal translating. Judges and magistrates in many countries are notorious for their insistence on *verbatim* interpretations. Laster and Taylor (1994) described the verbatim requirement of some court systems as "a legal fiction necessitated by the inadmissibility of hearsay evidence (i.e., information reported by someone other than the witness) in the common-law courtroom (p. 112)," yet, surveys of expectations of users of

interpreting services indicate that even in the courtroom, opinions vary as to how far the interpreter may legitimately stray from the form of the original message. Fowler (1997) found that although they viewed the interpreter as a conduit, they were clear that it was the responsibility of the interpreter to explain any breakdowns in communication. Kelly (2000) found that most legal professionals were opposed to the interpreter including cultural mediation in their interpretations. Kadric (2001) found they would accept that the interpreter will assume tasks such as *simplifying the judge's utterances* and *explaining legal language* for their clients, and 85% of them expected the interpreter to explain cultural references to the court. Delegates to a highly technical conference full of jargon-laden speeches intended for specialists may also expect more literal interpretations when the interpreters are not specialized in the subject matter. Savvy consumers realize that some interpretations will be more literal renditions from source to target language, from which they will be able to re-construct the meaning from their own specialized knowledge.

In the world of SL interpreting, where some of our deaf clients are truly bilingual (having mastered the written language as well as SL), some deaf or hard-of-hearing people prefer to see the interpreter render a literal sign-for-word transliteration of the message. They may feel the need to know exact words that their interlocutors are using or simply not trust the interpreter's fluency in the natural SL and prefer to effectively do the *interpreting* work themselves. Though such a literal interpretation may enable the deaf bilingual access to form as well as content, strict transliterating is not well suited to the visual medium. In a natural SL, the compacting of information through the use of space, the incorporation of location and movement of a signed verb, or specific mouth movements incompatible with the mouthing of English, are often deleted in transliteration, especially in situations of simultaneous interpreting with a rapid-fire delivery. Strict transliterating tends to be stressful and both mentally and physically demanding for the interpreter, and at the same time, visually dense for the deaf consumer.

Napier (2005) found that skilled interpreters switched between free and literal interpretation methods as a linguistic strategy in order to ensure access to content while still providing subject-specific terminology through fingerspelling. She argued that university students and adult deaf people express themselves along a continuum of signing styles and that they expect interpreters to do likewise as the situation warrants. The question of transliterating for deaf students has been particularly contentious in primary and secondary schools, where the children may not yet *have* clear expectations of the interpreter's role. While the consensus among scholars and practitioners of interpreting has favored a natural sign language like ASL for the most efficient interpreting, some educators have proposed using strict transliteration in classes where deaf students are integrated into hearing classrooms. The generation of deaf students taught with this philosophy, however, has not shown any significant increase in literacy (Marschark & Spencer, 2003).

Clearly, the choice of *literal* or *free* interpretation for any interpreter depends on the situation and the expectations of the consumers. Transliteration, however, constitutes a significant difference between signed- and spoken-language interpreters' practice. Community interpreters in minority spoken languages may use some code-switching and code-mixing (as do their clients), but they are never expected to provide full-fledged literal interpretations in their everyday practice. Members of spoken language minorities who achieve positions of power in the majority culture usually are assimilated and speak the majority language fluently, functioning without interpreters, whereas deaf people in such positions, although perfectly competent in the majority written language, still may prefer interpreters or transliterators for face-to-face verbal exchanges.<sup>3</sup>

Deaf people who were surveyed about SL interpreting mention the "attitude" of the interpreter as often, or more often, than fidelity to the message. *Attitude* usually implies respect for deaf people, their language, and their community as well as evidence that the interpreter's cultural competence comes from authentic interaction with that community (Smith & Savidge, 2002; Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005).

Napier & Rohan (2003) designed a study of Australian deaf users of interpreting services using a

3 Remember that interpreters in the US were routinely accredited separately for interpreting and transliterating skills in the RID certification process until 2006; most other countries have not tested *separately* for transliteration skills, considering a sign language to be a continuum between the natural sign language and "signed English" (or "signed Japanese", etc., depending on the country). The Australian model is tiered according to "para-professional," "professional," and "conference level" interpreters. In the UK, interpreters are qualified as "junior trainee," "trainee," or "member of the register." In all three accreditation systems, *transliterating* now is incorporated into the generalist test as simply a part of what may be expected of interpreters in their day-to-day work.

diary of 31 deaf persons' reactions to actual interpreted meetings or events during a six-week period, with follow up focus groups to elicit additional responses about the consumers' perceptions of the quality of the interpretations. Not surprisingly, deaf consumers were generally more satisfied with interpreters of their own choosing (34% of the time) and with accredited professional interpreters (rather than para-professionals). Deaf consumers cited professionalism (punctuality, attire, etc.) as their first comment 40.7% of the time, while efficacy of message translation was cited only 12.3% of the time in their first comments. Most of the comments centered on professionalism, adequacy of the message translation, personal characteristics, and signing skills.

### Measuring Fidelity

In the 1980s practitioner-researchers in the spoken language community (Mackintosh, 1983; Stenzl, 1989) began calling for a more science-based approach to studying interpreting, emphasizing empirical research in the cognitive sciences (psychology and the psycho-, neuro-, and socio- branches of linguistics). Measuring *lexical* accuracy scientifically is problematic since word-for-word correspondences are rarely exact from language to language. Mackintosh (1983) created a scoring system to measure *semantic equivalence* on the clause or phrase level, with judges giving points for each unit of information reiterated in the target output (accuracy averaged from 70% to 90%). Other researchers attempted to measure fidelity based on *propositional analysis*, the segmentation of discourse into *predicates*, or *heads*, and *arguments*" (Lambert, 1989; adapted for SL interpreters by Strong & Rudser, 1985). However, these approaches are strictly linguistic and do not consider pragmatic concerns like overall success of the exchange in the minds of the participants, intentionality, and interactivity. Comparison of information from source to target language has resulted in research on identifying interpreting *errors* or *miscues*, typically categorized as *omissions*, *additions*, *corrections*, or *substitutions* (Barik, 1972; Gerver, 2002). Cokely (1992) included *intrusions* from the source language which sound or look awkward in the target language, and added the notion of *reparable* and *irreparable* errors, i.e., those errors that the audience can mentally repair when they hear or see the interpretation, and those errors which pass unperceived and are mistakenly assumed to be the message from the speaker.

Wadensjö (1998) viewed certain omissions as deliberate choices on the part of the interpreters. She argued that reduced renditions are sometimes necessary to meet the communicative goals of the interaction. Napier (2005) proposed that some omissions are actually coping strategies employed by the interpreter committed to a successful communication, as, for example, when the omitted information is redundant, irrelevant, or would lead to confusion or misunderstanding. She argued that these *strategic intentional omissions* were not errors at all and that purposeful omissions contribute to the success of the communication. Thus, being faithful to the message is far more than linguistic fidelity: it necessarily implies conforming to the participants' goals for the interaction. Measuring fidelity is obviously a complex task. Faithfulness depends on so many linguistic and sociolinguistic factors that it is difficult to measure with any exactitude.

### Conclusion

Rather than rendering isolated linguistic utterances, the successful interpreter partners with each participant in turn. The interpreter is faithful to the goals of each speaker; hence, the interpreter is an ally of both participants alternately and, in a very real sense, neutral. The partnership between an interpreter and a participant begins with a time of preparation, which may be brief or extensive depending on the situation. The interpreter who knows the participants and their backgrounds and relationship, has been introduced to the jargon, acronyms, and the spelling of proper names which may be discussed, and is aware of previous encounters or discussions between the participants, will have more contextual information to ensure that the information is conveyed accurately and faithfully. There are situations, especially very formal or structured events, when the participants cannot or do not desire to *partner* with the interpreters. Any partnership, even a temporary one, requires mutual commitment. When either of the partners chooses not to cooperate, the interpreter can only process linguistic and cultural references to the extent possible with the clues at hand for guidance. Far from functioning like a conduit or telephone wire, in an ideal interpreting situation the interpreter is a co-creator of meaning, actively aware that the goals and intentions of the interlocutors supersede

the interpreter's own personal beliefs. In co-constructing messages, the interpreter is thus faithful not only to the content of what they say but also to the intent behind it, increasing the chances that the parties will truly understand each other.

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