

My project

The training of Community Interpreters. **A comparison between "didactic" and "real" interpretations**

State of the art

Community Interpreting has not been as widely studied as Conference Interpreting. Only over the last few years, and in particular after the publication of "Interpreting as Interaction" by Wadensjö in 1998, has Community Interpreting gathered momentum, causing a rethinking of roles and norms of Conference Interpreting which were uncritically applied to Community Interpreting.

It is widely acknowledged now that some of the norms which were theorized for Conference settings are not possible in Community ones. But a lot still has to be done to identify the norms, the roles and the skills involved in Community Interpreting, and to develop teaching methods that foster the improvement of those skills in students.

Scientific objectives

This project aims at giving my own contribution to the training of Community Interpreters (those working in face to face encounters between two clients who do not speak the same language).

My objective is to build two corpora of "didactic" and "real" interpretations, codified following the norms of the Text Encoding Initiative and indexed using the software Xaira (Dodd, 2008), and to test the null hypothesis that there are no linguistic differences between students' interpretations at university and professionals' interpretations at work.

By transcribing oral data in a machine-friendly and reader-friendly format (Cencini & Aston, 2002: 57), I should meet the requirement of real data, which are often lacking (Rosemberg, 2007: 66).

By doing a quantitative analysis, I may identify recurrent linguistic phenomena and provide an objective base for a subsequent qualitative analysis.

By doing a qualitative analysis, I could observe most noticeable "linguistic facts" (Goffman, 1981) and provide their "significant functional explanations" (Levinson, 1983: 40).

Assuming that teaching and learning Community Interpreting amounts to teaching and learning a wide range of notions and skills, I first aim at inferring some of these skills from real data, by analysing and interpreting certain linguistic facts and their frequencies.

On the basis of these data, I will then test my null hypothesis:

Didactic Interpretations = Real Interpretations
that is

Skills used in Didactic Interpretations = Skills used in Real Interpretation

And I will finally work out a didactic method to allow the transfer of the skills which proved to be the most frequent and the most useful in real settings.

Whatever the results may be, this project could be used for 4 different purposes:

1) to understand what students should be able to do after university, when they enter the job market;

2) to have real, and already transcribed, material to be used for role-plays in class;
3) to analyse language and promote linguistic awareness (see Aston 2002 & 2004, Bernardini 2000, 2002 & 2004, and Gavioli 2005);
4) to "spy" a specific discourse community (medical, legal or business) and understand its world vision (Swales, 1990).

Methods

Study:

Literature review [in progress];

Recordings:

Recordings of classes and exams of English and French courses of "Trattativa" at the Advanced School for Interpreters and Translators in Forlì [in progress];

Transcriptions:

Transcriptions in TEI-XML, indexed using the software Xaira;

Variables:

List of variables (at least 10) to compare "didactic" and "real" interpretations. I will use some of the variables which proved to be useful in my Master's Degree Thesis on TV Interpreting (e.g. discourse markers, pronouns) and add new ones (e.g. hesitations) on the basis of the literature review, and of the daily observation of data;

Comparison:

I will draw a comparison between English "didactic" and "real" interpretations, and between French "didactic" and "real" interpretations. A comparison between English and French results is also possible.

Combining *quantitative* and *qualitative* analysis (Heritage & Maynard, 2006: xii-xiii)

Expected results

I expect two possible scenarios:

1) Frequencies for the variables chosen may be equal in "didactic" and "real" interpretations, hence confirming the null hypothesis and proving that skills developed at university are those used in real settings. In this case my project would provide a scientific justification of courses that are currently taught and of the teaching methods that are used.

2) (most likely) Frequencies for the same variables may differ in "didactic" and "real" settings, hence disconfirming the null hypothesis and showing that some skills needed in real settings are not taught at university.

Whatever the scenario, and although to a limited extent, this project seems to be able to provide useful information on *how interpreting is carried out* (descriptive approach) rather than on *how it should be carried out* (prescriptive approach), potentially helping professors and students to better teach and do Community Interpreting.

[...] an explorer can never know what he is exploring until it has been explored. He carries no Baedeker in his pocket, no guidebook which tell him which churches he should visit or at which hotels he should stay. He has only the ambiguous folklore of others who have passed that way.

(Bateson, 1972: XXIV)

Here are some of the people who have, somehow, passed that way...

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