
Jungwha S.H. Choi

In the world of the 21st century, it is said that the only constant is change: change that not only touches the minute facets of our daily lives, but change that also manifests itself in all arenas of academics, professions and training.

The 1st Forlì Conference on Interpreting Studies focused on changes that the World of Interpreting – encompassing research, the profession and training – faces in the 21st century. While looking back upon past developments, participants to this Conference sought to take stock of changes that have taken place, and also provide an outlook for what the future will hold and expect from the inhabitants and observers of this World.

Interpreting in the 21st Century: Challenges and Opportunities provides those of us who were not fortunate enough to be present at the Forlì Conference with an insightful sense of the prevalent ideas and the ambience of the Conference itself.

At the very beginning, the editors provide a brief introduction to the Conference, followed by a comprehensive survey of the papers in this volume. The papers are divided into three groups: Focus on research, Interpreting outside the conference hall, and Interpreter training. To wrap up, a summary of the closing panel session is included at the end.

Alessandra Riccardi’s paper is the first to be introduced in the “Focus on research” group. In this paper, Riccardi provides an overview of academic fields that have thus far influenced interpreting studies, and then provides brief accounts of research carried out on Interpreted Texts (ITs), which suggest that the distinctive nature of ITs require new approaches in research on interpreting as a whole. Riccardi then outlines a descriptive sheet for IT and, before concluding, briefly mentions studies that have been carried out on quality and interpreting strategies.

Robin Setton and the team of Marco Cencini and Guy Aston have each contributed concrete ideas on research based on corpora. Setton proposes the use of corpus analysis in the task of examining interpretation processes, and sets forth ideas on how a corpus should be built, what the level of representation should be and how such corpora could be utilized in interpreting studies. Cencini and Aston, stressing the need to make interpreting data accessible to the public, look into building corpora composed of data that is easily interchangeable. In this context, their paper provides information on the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI), and supplies readers with samples of encoding carried out according to TEI guidelines.

Gun-Viol Vik-Tuovinen and Peter Mead, in their respective papers, both examine retrospection as a viable tool for interpreting research. Both papers are based on empirical studies carried out by the authors. Vik-Tuovinen looks at what the distinguishing features are between experienced and inexperienced interpreters, using quantitative and qualitative data collected through retrospection on simultaneous interpretation performances. One of the findings that could be quite relevant in the classroom was that professionals, even during simulated experiments, performed as if they were in front of a real-life audience. In Peter Mead’s paper, we are introduced to a study on pauses in the consecutive mode. Retrospection is used to gain insight on the interpreters’ perspective of why pauses occur in consecutive interpretation. In this study of interpreters of different levels and of A and B languages, it is noted that fluency ultimately depends on both linguistic and non-linguistic capabilities. Again, more food for thought for the training of interpreters.

The next paper by Laura Salmon Kovarski surveys the various problems that Russian names, acronyms and allocutives pose to interpreters, and calls for interpreters to build “cross-cultural competence” (p. 86) and awareness of “the Skopos and the communicative situation” (p. 86) – yet more additional considerations for our classrooms.
The three papers that follow all have to do with the issue of quality. Franz Pöchhacker first provides models on the concepts of ‘interpreting’ and ‘quality,’ and moves on to provide an overview of past and present research on quality. Throughout his paper, Pöchhacker emphasizes that interpreting is fundamentally a “socio-communicative practice” (p. 96). Thus, no matter what “type” of interpreting we focus on – be it conference interpretation or community interpretation – quality should be determined on the basis of whether communication has been successful.

This in turn leads to a plea by Pöchhacker for researchers to broaden their horizons to embrace and strengthen research across the many types of interpreting. A different approach to quality can be found in Giuliana Garzone’s paper, which proposes to use the concept of norms in the study of quality. Garzone suggests that quality can be defined in terms of behavioral norms expected for “good” interpreters, and provides examples of how such norms would work in the assessment of quality in simultaneous interpretation. A most important statement is that quality and norms are never absolute, but depend wholly upon the context within which the interpretation is being performed.

The next paper by Sylvia Kalina first surveys the work that has been done so far on interpreting quality. Kalina then defines interpreting as “an interactive communication process” (p.124) and sets out groupings of factors that affect interpreting quality. As with Pöchhacker and Garzone, Kalina also emphasizes that quality of mediated communication, in its many forms of interpretation, needs to be approached with a much broader view, both in research and in training.

That interpreting is not merely conference interpretation is a view that winds through the three papers on quality. So naturally, the conference moves on to examine “Interpreting outside the conference hall.”

The first paper in this group is by Helge Niska. Niska, with much reference to the Swedish experience, gives us an account of how community interpreters have been trained, what the current trend is, and what the future holds. Niska stresses the need for training to meet the requirements of very specific interpreting situations, coming once again to the concept of quality defined in terms of the interpretation situation. Erik Hertog looks at the realm of legal interpreting and the concept of legal interpretation being necessary in the protection of human rights.

Hertog provides information on the various EU provisions constituting a legal basis for language services in the legal field, and then gives an overview of the GROTIUS Project, a project aiming to introduce international best practices in the field of legal interpreting throughout the EU countries. Hertog’s paper ends with an appeal to EU CUITI institutes to work together to face the various challenges in conference and legal interpreting.

The next paper by Bernd Meyer examines the difficulties of medical interpreting by providing a summary of its representative features and a sample situation where these features are readily identifiable. Meyer states that specific, well-defined skills are needed in the field of medical interpreting, and that more research is needed on the complexity of the work that interpreters must carry out when interpreting even very ordinary types of discourse in community interpretation settings.

The next paper deals with signed-language interpretation. In her paper, Cynthia Jane Kellet Bidoli outlines the situation of signed-language interpretation in Italy, and then provides information on the similarities and differences between spoken and signed interpretation. As in previous papers, we are brought once again to see that interpreting, in all its modes and types, is essentially the same in that it “enables communication between different languages and cultures” (p. 179).

Claudia Monacelli’s paper reports on a training program established by the Italian Army with the purpose of training military interpreters who will participate in Peace Support
Operations. In this paper, Monacelli introduces the concept of “dynamic equilibrium” (p. 184) as an element that influences the actions of interpreters, particularly those placed in tense situations such as military operations. Monacelli concludes by stressing the importance of research, especially research on training, which, according to Monacelli, may “help interpreting studies find its own dynamic equilibrium” (p. 193).

The next three papers deal with media interpretation. First, Ingrid Kurz reports on efforts to answer the question: Is it really more stressful to interpret for live TV broadcasts than to interpret for conferences? Kurz lists the special stress factors of media interpretation, and then summarizes existing research on stress, focusing on how stress is measured. Kurz then sets forth preliminary results of a pilot study, which confirm through physiological measurements that live TV interpreting is indeed more stressful than interpreting for a conference.

In the next paper, Gabriele Mack, working on the assumption that “interpreting is a socially determined activity” (p. 205) utilizes Dell Hymes’ framework for the analysis of communicative events to show that TV interpreting and conference interpreting are indeed different. Mack stresses that, accordingly, a new concept of quality is needed for TV interpreting, and that training should concentrate on effective communication and adaptability. The third paper on media interpretation reports on the findings of a case study on audience perception and attitudes on ad hoc interpreting by a well-known compère on Italian media. Delia Chiaro looks at levels of trust and tolerance on the part of audiences in response to ad hoc interpreting on TV, and finds that the charisma of the compère at times influenced the judgment of the audience so much as to make them more tolerant to mistakes in the interpretation. Yet another paper that exhibits the differences that exist in concepts of quality among the many types of interpretation, and that, therefore, calls for more research on each of the interpretation typologies!

In many papers discussed above, calls for more encompassing training have been issued. Thus, we move on to the third group of papers on “Interpreter training.”

Sergio Viaggio leads off this group with a call for all students to be equipped with a “pragmatic compass” (p. 229). Viaggio stresses that conference interpretation should be understood and practiced as “oral mediated interlingual communication (p. 244). “It is the interpreter’s ultimate task, therefore, to help achieve … relevant identity between meaning meant and meaning understood” (p. 233). To do so, students must learn to be aware of the specific purpose that the speaker and the audience have with regard to the speech at hand. Only by understanding the specific purpose will the student be able to produce a relevant and therefore acceptable interpretation. Viaggio also provides an exercise that can be used in the classroom to help students practice the skill of being both cognitively and pragmatically relevant. In the next paper, Salvador Pippa and Mariachiara Russo set forth a proposal for conference interpretation aptitude testing based on paraphrase. After outlining the admissions tests for various interpretation and translation institutes around the world, the authors provide a theoretical framework and a model for analysis of the proposed paraphrase-based aptitude test.

Linguistics is placed at the center of attention in Francesca Santulli’s paper, which proposes a curriculum for interpreter training that includes linguistics. Santulli emphasizes that, as interpreters work to and from natural languages, it is important that interpreters understand just how natural languages work. Santulli also proposes to view notes produced in the course of consecutive interpretation as a “third language (p. 261),” and lists the linguistic features of this third language, stating that just as linguistic knowledge of natural languages can help trainees with their interpreting, knowledge in the third language can help foster better note-taking skills.

The next paper by Christopher John Garwood discusses reasons for the autonomous features of the interpreted text, and implications for training. Results of an empirical study show that professional interpreters first harness as much extratextual, intratextual and
pragmatic information as possible in an effort to gain a coherent understanding of the source text, and then utilize cohesion strategies and rhetoric to render a more coherent version in the target language. In particular, interpreted texts of professional interpreters are found to have much more cohesion than both the original source texts and the interpretations produced by trainee interpreters. The final paper on “Interpreter training” espouses the use of computers in interpreter training. Laura Gran, Angela Carabelli and Raffaela Merlini describe the merits of online learning, the first and foremost being that it enables personalized learning, and introduces readers to IRIS, a database of interpretation and translation material, and InterprIT, a program designed to help trainees with note-taking.

“What lies ahead” is the subtitle of the closing panel summary by Amalia Amato and Peter Mead. Possible future trends in research, the profession and training were discussed. But the bottom line seems to be that “all forms of interpreting have a strong common denominator – i.e., their socio-communicative function” (p. 297). To further develop the world of interpreting, it therefore seems necessary to build stronger links among research, the profession and training, and also among the many types of interpreting.

To take another spin on the words of the Jedi Knights quoted by Sergio Viaggio: “May the Force be with you” – in all endeavors for better communication across the changing face of interpreting.

Jungwha S.H. Choi
Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Seoul, Korea


C’est en quelque sorte une autobiographie d’un type particulier mais qui est à lire parce qu’elle est exceptionnelle, à cause de son auteur hors du commun qui a consacré plus de trois quarts de siècle de sa vie au service de la traduction, des traducteurs et des langues à travers le monde. Il y a là un récit unique, dont les enseignements de quelqu’un, qui a été fasciné par les langues et qui a exploré les multiples facettes multicolores des langues et des cultures au service de la traduction biblique, sont encore d’actualité. On connaît d’ailleurs les nombreux traités, livres et articles de l’auteur où la linguistique se nourrit de traductologie et se colore de culture et vice versa, où le pragmatisme se mêle à l’expérience et à la réflexion, et où la théorie côtoie le bon sens et les enseignements pratiques. Le livre donne d’ailleurs les principales références dans une bibliographie sélective (p. 151 à 154). Après quelques pages personnelles, l’auteur relate, dans la première partie, ses voyages et ses travaux linguistiques dans plus de quatre-vingt-dix pays et avec encore davantage de langues! La deuxième partie traite plus spécifiquement de traductions bibliques, de textes et d’interprétations. Le retour aux sources est bien entendu une nécessité, mais il ne supprime pas, dans aucun cas d’ailleurs, même s’il s’agit d’un texte dans la langue originelle, diverses possibilités d’interprétation. On peut d’ailleurs se demander comment être sûr de rendre toujours la pensée de l’auteur. La troisième partie présente un autoportrait qui explique pourquoi cet “éclectique pragmatiste” s’est lancé dans cette expérience fruitive des langues. Un livre à conseiller aux profanes pour leur faire découvrir la complexité des langues et de toute traduction, aux spécialistes qui pourront revivre leurs propres expériences, et surtout aux étudiants qui pourront y trouver ample matière à réflexion. C’est un petit livre sans prétention, très humble, et plein de sagesse et de conseils, tout comme d’ailleurs le caractère et la vie de son auteur.

André Clas
Université de Montréal, Montréal, Canada