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Researching signed language interpreting research through a sociolinguistic lens

Cynthia Roy

Gallaudet University, Washington DC, USA
cynthia.roy@gallaudet.edu

Melanie Metzger

Gallaudet University, Washington DC, USA
melanie.metzger@gallaudet.edu

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Abstract. Sociolinguistic processes are inherent in communication and thus the practice of interpretation. Interpreting constitutes intentional sociolinguistic analyses by interpreters, and reflects the tacit, sociolinguistic knowledge of interpreters engaged in the task. Sociolinguistic approaches and methodologies are well suited to interpreting studies, precisely because interpreting involves such a complex array of language and social behavior. In this sense, not only is the sociolinguistic context a relevant aspect of interpretation as a profession, but also the larger sociolinguistic context in which interpreters work. Each interpreted interaction undertaken by a professional interpreter is situated within communities that harbor their own unique multilingual, bilingual, and language contact phenomenon; within a setting that represents a snapshot of what may be a long history of language policies and planning; and in a social environment beset with language attitudes about one or both of the languages involved.

In this article, we will describe some major and minor sociolinguistic studies of interpretation with the underlying assumption that interpretation itself constitutes a sociolinguistic activity from the moment an assignment is accepted, including the products and processes inherent to the task, reflecting variously issues of bilingualism or multilingualism, language contact, variation, language policy and planning, language attitudes, and of course, discourse analysis.

In short, sociolinguistic concerns are such an integral part of interpretation that relevant sociolinguistic areas are being studied by a variety of researchers from diverse and interdisciplinary backgrounds. Just as the study of sociolinguistic issues as they pertain to interpreting have a great potential to impact interpreting practice and pedagogy, the study of interpreters and interpretation has much potential to contribute to our understanding of sociolinguistics and the sociolinguistics of deaf communities.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, research methods, sign language interpreting.

Introduction¹

One of the things often said about interpreting as an academic endeavour is that it is multi-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary, meaning that it can be studied from a variety of disciplines - sociology, anthropology, psychology, linguistics and/or a mix of these disciplines. It is also said that interpreting is cross-disciplinary, meaning a researcher can use frameworks, theories,

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methodologies, or analysis from more than one discipline to study different facets of interpreting.

We would like to suggest how it is that sociolinguistics is already multi-, cross- and interdisciplinary and, given its focus on both linguistic matters and social ones, is perhaps the most valuable way to study interpreting, whether in spoken language combinations or signed language (SL) combinations. In this article, however, we focus on studies in SL interpreting.

Sociolinguistics includes an array of approaches that can answer many kinds of questions about human interaction. Sociolinguistics does not focus on language as an abstract system, but rather on language in use – how humans conceptualize particular meanings or select among the possibilities of meaning in their everyday lives just as interpreters select among the possibilities of meaning intended by others. Studying how interpreters do what they do requires a rigorous analysis of linguistic form and function with the awareness that producing and understanding communication are matters of human feeling and human interaction – this is sociolinguistics.

The founding fathers of sociolinguistics, Dell Hymes and John Gumperz (1972) argued that language can only be studied and understood from within the active social and communicative situation in which it is embedded. This means that they believed that to truly understand human communication, language behaviour should be studied when captured in real events with real people doing real and genuine talk to meet their own communicative goals. While sociolinguistics borrows both theoretical constructs and methodological approaches primarily from linguistics, anthropology and sociology, one can now find studies in a multitude of disciplines that while not labelling themselves sociolinguistics are so in nature, all blending together to study human behaviour, most of which is revealed in the use of language.

Sociolinguistic approaches and methodologies are then well suited to interpreting studies, precisely because interpreting involves such a complex array of language and social behaviour. Interpreters perform intentional sociolinguistic analyses, and reflect tacit, sociolinguistic knowledge as they engage in the task of interpreting. In this sense, not only is the sociolinguistic context a relevant aspect of interpretation as a profession, but also the larger sociolinguistic context in which interpreters work. Each interpreted interaction undertaken by a professional interpreter is situated within communities that harbor their own unique multilingual, bilingual, and language contact phenomenon; within a setting that represents a snapshot of what may be a long history of language policies and planning; and in a social environment beset with language attitudes about one or both of the languages involved.

The dynamic nature of interpreted interaction has led SL researchers to sociolinguistic investigations of interpreting. These studies have followed a variety of methodological approaches within sociolinguistics, as well as described different aspects of interpretation. Since the earliest studies of signed language interpretation in the 1970s, a growing body of research from a variety of disciplines has contributed to our understanding of interpretation as an interdisciplinary activity (Metzger, 2006).

In this essay, we describe some major and minor sociolinguistic studies of signed language interpretation with the underlying assumption that interpretation itself constitutes a sociolinguistic activity from the moment an assignment is accepted, including the products and processes inherent to the task, reflecting variously issues of bilingualism or multilingualism, language contact, variation, language policy and planning, language attitudes, and discourse. We also describe some of the various sub-disciplines of sociolinguistics and their methodological approaches

While there are several American research studies on signed language interpreting from the 1970s and early 1980s (Brasel, 1976; Colton, 1982; Hurwitz, 1980), it was not until the mid-1980s that sociolinguistic studies first made their appearance. The emerging field of sociolinguistics and its exploration of how people spoke in ordinary settings pushed researchers toward data that was authentic and produced in a setting where the participants were involved in a real activity, such as giving a lecture, or seeing a doctor. Researchers began to move away from concerns of error, correctness, and source-text /target-text comparisons and to focus on the multiparty interaction with the interpreter as coordinator and negotiator of meanings (Wadensjö, 1998).

Toward a sociolinguistic model

Cokely study

The first signed language interpreting dissertation to be called a sociolinguistic study was by Cokely (1985), which, while focusing on “miscue analysis” recognized that sociolinguistic factors influence interpreter choices. Cokely’s dissertation *Towards a sociolinguistic model of the interpreting process: A focus on American Sign Language (ASL) and English* and later book *Interpretation: A sociolinguistic model* (1992) analyse the performance of six interpreters at a conference and identify a taxonomy of interpreter miscues that includes omissions, substitutions, additions, intrusions, and anomalies. These miscues point to cognitive stages of information-processing from which Cokely designed a seven-stage model of the interpreting process, from the moment an interpreter receives an incoming message from a speaker of one language to the production of the final message in the target language.

Cokely’s greatest nod toward sociolinguistic methodology was in terms of data collection: he filmed interpreters as they worked, interpreting from English to American Sign Language (ASL) at a conference on interpreter education. He transcribed four speeches and their simultaneous interpretations into ASL, and then sampled 20 percent of the taped time, or the final minute of each five-minute segment. While attention centred on single lexical items and syntactic or semantic equivalence, Cokely also pointed out anomalies, inappropriate translations according to social and cultural norms. His work began to bridge the previous focus on cognitive processing to a new sociolinguistic focus.

The next studies applied methodological approaches and theoretical frameworks developed within sociolinguistics, ranging from conversational analysis, discourse analysis, to frames and schemas, and to code-switching and code-mixing, among others.

Interpreting as a sociolinguistic discourse process

In this section, we present two major dissertation studies, along with other smaller studies, from a sociolinguistic lens, looking at the work of SLIs as they are inserted into discourse events with three or more participants in work environments.

Roy study

The first study using this approach was conducted by Roy (1989, 2000) whose approach comes from interactional sociolinguistics, specifically following in the steps of Gumperz (1982) and Tannen (1984). Roy’s study focused on the turn exchanges of an interpreted interaction between a college

professor and a graduate student. Up to this point, investigations into interpreting had either been experiments or films of interpreters as they worked in large, public settings. But signed language interpreters do the bulk of their work in face-to-face, private meetings with three participants: two primary speakers and an interpreter. This study was the first to film the kind of interaction interpreters engage in on a daily basis.

A professor-student interaction was filmed, transcribed and, then, combining structural analysis with Tannen's (1984) use of sociolinguistic playback interviews to determine participant perspectives, the interaction among all three participants was analyzed. Roy's findings focused on both the structure of the turn-taking (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974) in the three-way conversation, and on the participants' intentions and interpretations about the turns that were taken (Bennett 1981; Tannen 1984).

Her findings revealed that speakers take turns with the interpreter, the interpreter takes turns, and that this activity demonstrates that the interpreter, rather than being a neutral conveyor of messages, is an active participant who can potentially influence the direction and outcome of the event.

At that time, the ideology of the field was that interpreters should make it seem as if speakers are talking directly to each other, and to act as a mechanical conduit and simply pass messages back and forth. Roy's work demonstrated that, although many turns are exchanged through the interpreter smoothly, there are also turns that are problematic, and interpreters are in a position to manage and direct the interaction.

Metzger study

Where Roy demonstrated that interpreters are active in the communicative process via turn taking, Metzger (1995, 1999) pursued the question of interpreter influence in ASL-English interpreted interactions further and in much greater detail, combining several approaches of sociolinguistics. As she explained, the paradox of interpreting is that, while the goal of interpreters is to provide access to an interaction of which they are not a part, they are, in fact, physically and interactionally present (1999: 21–24). Thus, the question should be, what is the interpreter's influence on interactive discourse?

Metzger examined two videotaped, medical interviews: one a mock, student-interpreted interview; and the other, a real-life, professionally interpreted, paediatric interview. Using frame and schema theories from combining sociology and linguistics, (Schiffrin, 1994; Tannen, 1979; Tannen & Wallat 1993), Metzger identified four frames in both interactions, and was able to show that while the participants shared similar schemas for the medical encounters, they did not share similar schemas for the interpreted encounter.

This mismatch had an impact on the interaction and the interpreters produced self-generated utterances, which manifested in a variety of ways (such as explanations, repetitions, responses to questions, and others), whether interpreters were relaying messages or managing the interaction. These findings complement Roy's findings of the active participation of an interpreter in one encounter, and mirror Wadensjö's (1992) findings in spoken language interpretation, and they lead to a more complex picture of the question about interpreter neutrality.

Metzger demonstrated, for example, that if interpreters do not generate contributions, a myriad of interactional problems can ensue, while interpreter behaviour becomes even more marked. Her study was expanded in Metzger, Fleetwood, and Collins (2004) by applying her findings to additional ASL-English discourse genres and modes. Specifically, a comparison of an interpretation of a graduate seminar course, and an interpretation of a panel of Deaf Blind people being interviewed about the Deaf Blind community,

and findings from Metzger's original study revealed that interpreter-generated contributions are common regardless of setting or mode, but that variation can exist within the interpreter-generated contributions.

Metzger's study models and exemplifies the ways in which sociolinguistics is extraordinarily suited for this complex study of human interaction. The act of interpreting is a search for meaning in what is uttered or signed in a context, including the linguistic, social, and cultural knowledge that participants use to make sense of what they hear or see. This is the focus of sociolinguistic studies and of interpreting, in both a theoretical sense and a practical sense.

Further studies

One impact of the Roy and Metzger studies was to demonstrate sociolinguistic approaches in studying all aspects of the interpretation activity, and which could be applied in both spoken and signed language interpreting, and, primarily, aim at analysing the discourse of interpreters in the workplace.

Since these two studies, studies of interpreted discourse with similar results have followed. For example, Sanheim (2003) extends Roy's work on turn taking by applying her taxonomy to a medical interpreted encounter and supports Roy's findings regarding turns taken by the interpreter. Marks (2012) replicated Metzger's findings on a different set of data and her findings reinforce that footing changes and interpreter-generated contributions that result from turn management are related to Metzger's interaction management categories.

Additionally, Mather (2005) assesses and identifies turn-taking regulators used by teachers and interpreters in mainstream classrooms. Her study expands the examination of interpretation and turn-taking through analysis of the multiparty interaction inherent in classrooms. Bélanger (2004) focused on interpreter-mediated encounters between LSQ (*Langue des signes québécoise*, the sign language used by Deaf people of francophone families in Québec) and spoken French in Canada. Using symbolic interactionism as a framework, Bélanger's study confirmed the findings of Roy and Metzger as to the extent of the interpreter's participation in interaction, and explored the patterns of communicative behaviour, demonstrating that while six different configurations were possible, it could be construed as two different levels: a primary exchange and collateral exchanges. Findings suggest that collateral exchanges arise as needed by participant face-work and may or may not include the interpreter.

Studies focusing on other sociolinguistic aspects of discourse include politeness, prosody, marking topic boundaries, and use of constructed action and dialogue. Roush (2007) addresses the stereotype that Deaf ASL-users are direct or blunt, through analysis of two speech/social activities of requests and refusals. He finds that these particular speech acts lend themselves to indirect ways of speaking in ASL and suggests that interpreters should develop "a macro level understanding of the politeness dynamics within each language community" to expand their role as politeness mediators (p. 145).

Nicodemus (2009) examines prosodic markers in ASL as interpreters produce them. She finds that interpreters make both systematic and stylistic use of prosodic markers and produce multiple prosodic markers at utterance boundaries – seven or more markers were produced within a two-second interval, and one third of the markers were sequential rather than simultaneous. These findings impact not only discourse structure and cohesion, but also issues of equivalence.

Winston and Monikowski (2003) analyse interpreters' marking of topic boundaries in an analysis of commercially produced ASL-English

interpreting and transliterating models. Their primary focus was prosodic features (Winston, 2000), in particular, pausing which indicated major topic segments that were produced by three different interpreters who were producing both an interpretation (a freer rendition) and a transliteration (a more literal rendition) of the same English source text.

A major finding was that all three interpreters, while interpreting, produced “extralinguistic” pauses; that is, they stopped signing and clasp their hands in front of their lower body. This study incorporates the discourse-based analysis of topics in discourse, but by virtue of its focus on both free and literal interpretation, also addresses issues related to variation, as will be discussed below.

In another study steeped in both variation and discourse, Armstrong (2003) examines the use of constructed action and constructed dialogue by ASL-English interpreters. This study examined the work of four interpreters, two of whom were native users of ASL, and two who were second language users. In the English texts, the interpreters who were also native signers created and produced 16 or more instances of constructed action and dialogue, whereas the interpreters who were second language users may have attempted to create action and dialogue but were not successful. Moreover, in 8 out of 16 examples of native signers, the action and dialogue sequences appear in the same place.

Napier’s (2001) dissertation is an analysis of omissions in interpreted Auslan (Australian Sign Language) target texts from a university lecture source, typically examined as a kind of error associated with cognitive processing; however, in this study, she does so from a discourse-based, interactional perspective in which the omissions are categorized based on how aware the interpreter is of them and how intentional the omissions are.

Napier finds that interpreters make intentional omissions that are strategically designed to support the quality of their target productions, in addition to other types of omissions. Moreover, her study demonstrated that sociolinguistic factors, such as the context of situation, familiarity with the discourse environment, knowledge of the topic, and familiarity with the Deaf and non-Deaf participants affected the rate and types of omission occurrences.

In another study, Napier (2007) examined the collaboration of a deaf presenter and two sign language interpreters by examining their strategies for cooperation among all three. Drawing on a framework of interactional sociolinguistics, naturalistic data from a seminar presentation was analysed, focusing on the use of pauses, nods and eye contact as contextualization cues in the interpreter-mediated event.

It was found that the three participants used these cues deliberately and strategically for signalling comprehension, marking episodes, clarification and controlling the pace of the presentation; drawing on their frames of reference. Thus, the data suggest that the Gricean cooperative principle, when interpreting, involves the establishment of particular cues for negotiating meaning during the presentation.

It is clear from the studies reported in this section that discourse analysis provides a variety of methods and theoretical perspectives that support the examination of interpretation. Discourse-based analyses of interpretation have focused on a variety of discourse-based features or strategies, including turn-taking, politeness, topic, constructed action and dialogue, contextualization cues, and analysis of interpretation as an interactional, social encounter, including studies of the interpreter-generated contributions and the role of omissions from an interactional perspective.

Despite this rich variety, meaningful examination of interpretation is not limited to a discourse perspective.

Bilingualism, multilingualism, and language contact

Sociolinguistics devotes much attention to people who come into contact with more than one language, whether it be due to the type of interaction across language communities resulting in language contact phenomena or the knowledge of and use of two or more languages by an individual or community. Signed language interpreters – be they Deaf or non-Deaf, native signers or second-language signers, professional or lay interpreters – by nature of the interpreting task, embody bilingualism or multilingualism and language contact. This section will discuss some sociolinguistic studies that focus on interpreting from this sociolinguistic perspective.

Multilingualism

One issue pertains to interpreters working around geographical and/or political boundaries. Ramsey and Peña (2010) interview each other “to document issues in *la interpretación en la frontera* (‘border interpreting’) as well as our respective histories as participants in border life.” (5). Specifically, sociocultural issues are addressed by Ramsey and Peña as they examine the convergence of physical and cultural borders within quadrilingual interpreters interpreting between Mexican Sign Language, ASL, Spanish, and English around the Mexico-United States border.

The variability that sign language interpreters who work in the border zone encounter includes understanding the linguistic variation of Mexican Deaf people, who typically have a limited exposure to schooling, if any, as well as a limited exposure to Mexican Sign Language or Spanish. Moreover, they must apply their own multicultural and multilingual life experiences to master ways to explain social and cultural traditions and expectations within American, Mexican, and Deaf cultures.

Martinez (2007) examines the complicated, multilingual process of code-switching by Filipino interpreters when interpreting from Filipino Sign Language to Filipino, English, or another of the numerous languages spoken in the Philippines. Surprisingly, the interpretations revealed consistent and ongoing code-switching between Filipino and English for both monolingual and bilingual hearers. While the study offered no reasons as to why, it was clear that the interpreters needed to know not only Filipino and English, but other possible languages of the archipelago.

Because these studies address issues of bilingualism and multilingualism as they pertain to interpretation, they also touch on the unavoidable issue of language contact. Numerous studies of signed language interpretation examine the language contact question from different angles. Language contact – that is, code-switching, code-mixing, and lexical borrowing between English and ASL – exists within the scope of interpretation, as it requires that two languages be in contact in one social encounter. Understanding the effect of language contact in interpretations into ASL or other signed languages is vital in judgments of acceptability and accuracy in interpreting.

Language contact

Davis (1990) filmed four interpreters as they interpreted a faculty lecture from English into ASL at Gallaudet University² for a campus audience. He then transcribed and analysed their target-language output in ASL. The questions he asked were about how code-switching, code-mixing, and borrowing were manifested and the nature and structure of these phenomena

² Gallaudet University is a liberal arts university in Washington, D.C. established primarily to educate Deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

including the understanding that the situation, topic, and audience were also impacting linguistic decisions made by the interpreters. Because ASL is not only conveyed by signs, but also has oral, facial, and spatial channels for linguistic output, interpreters can visually represent English by lip movements or by fingerspelling English words.

In this study and in later work (cf. Davis, 2003), Davis found that the ASL-English interpreters could move from ASL mouth movements to forming English words on their lips, a sequence performed sequentially that is also a form of code-switching. When the interpreters were using both facial and manual components of ASL, they could simultaneously represent English with lip movements, a form of code-mixing. And finally, they could borrow from English by using lip movements and fingerspelling and then restructure to conform to the manner in which ASL uses lip movement (reducing the enunciation of a word) and fingerspelling (becoming a sign).

These strategies allowed interpreters to elucidate and disambiguate interpreted messages, and their uses were patterned similarly across all four interpreters, regardless of their native or non-native fluency in ASL. This study is a major contribution to the understanding of bilingual behaviours in language contact situations and how that impacts the linguistic choices interpreters make.

Inspired by the work of Davis, Napier (2006) analysed data collected from two Auslan/English interpreters, explored the influence of language contact on the interpretation, and then compared those findings with deaf Australians who produced texts into Auslan. The key features discussed are the use of fingerspelling and mouthing in the context of interlingual transference and interlingual interference. Referring to language contact phenomena between signed and spoken languages, as discussed by Lucas and Valli (1992) and Davis (1990, 2003), Napier discusses the interpreted renditions of Auslan-English interpreters which seemed influenced by language contact found within the Australian Deaf community and compared it with the Auslan language use of two deaf Australians presenting university lectures.

Contact signing

Regarding interpretation and Deaf communities, language contact also results in a form of contact signing³ (Lucas & Valli, 1992). Where interpreters are concerned, this issue can be examined as described above in the study conducted by Davis. However, in the American Deaf community, as is true in many communities that constitute a linguistic minority, language policies also enter into the experience of bilingual and multilingual people's lives.

For the American Deaf Community this has taken the form of inventions of coding systems that connect English words to ASL signs for use in education. Although this extends beyond the scope of this section (and this chapter), it is worth noting that interpreters interpret with adults who are products of an educational system. Thus, interpreters must by necessity be prepared to interpret with deaf adults who only know a signed code for English and prefer English-like signing,⁴ or, who are ASL-English bilinguals, but, in some contexts, might prefer a literal translation and do the interpreting work of the spoken source text themselves rather than see an interpretation into ASL. Studies of interpretations that seek to find various ways of saying the same thing, as translations from spoken English into ASL or English-like signing, are discussed below.

³ Contact signing is a variety of ASL that incorporates features of both ASL and English, and tends to portray a more English-like meaning.

⁴ English-like signing is another name for contact sign.

Variation

Variation as a sociolinguistic area of study examines the systematic choices made by members of a language community in keeping with linguistic and social factors, and reflecting the social organization of the community as well as grammatical constraints (see Bayley, this volume; Lucas, Bayley, Valli, Rose, & Wulf, 2001).

In this section we examine studies of interpretation as the target text varies between ASL, contact signing, or even some coded form of English. These studies focus on a variety of aspects, including the occurrence of grammatical and prosodic behaviours on the face and the use of space⁵ in target interpretations that are intended to be an English-like variety of signing, or contact signing.

Winston study

In a seminal case study, Winston (1989) investigated the discourse strategies of a literal interpretation in SLI; this was called ‘transliteration’⁶ in a classroom lecture. Her study was not only the first of its kind, but was also chosen by the national association of signed language interpreters to represent the standards for judging this kind of interpreting. Winston found in her case study that the interpreter used a number of features not anticipated in an English-like variety of interpreted target text, such as the use of spatial features found in ASL, and sections in which the source English was rearranged into a more “ASL-like” English for the signed target.

One example of this occurred when the interpreter reinterpreted passive structures into English active structures before signing an English-like variety. Thus, the interpreter maintained her goal of interpreting into an English-like variety of signing, but also adhered to the principle of making her target interpretation clear in the signed mode. Prior to this study the expectation was generally held that literal interpretation or transliteration would simply code English words into signs and string them together in English word order. This study provides clear evidence of an interpreter’s tacit understanding of the different language varieties with which she works, which warrants more research on both varieties of signing and on the nature of interpretation and the preparation those who work as professional interpreters.

Sofinski and other works

In a later study of interpreters working in a mainstream educational program⁷ in which interpreters were asked to sign English or some form of sign-coded English rather than ASL as a part of their daily professional work, Sofinski (2003) analysed the occurrence of grammatical features that appear on the face used by interpreters in signed language transliteration. This study, like Winston’s (1989), finds that interpreters do incorporate ASL-like elements in their English-like signing varieties while at work.

Sofinski, like Winston, also focused on transliteration. In a discourse-based study of how interpreters mark topic boundaries in both interpretation and transliteration, however, Winston and Monikowski (2003) examine

⁵ Signers make use of the physical space in front of their bodies to indicate locations, directions, and other features of the language.

⁶ Transliteration is a term used by American interpreters to mean changing one form of English, either spoken or written, into a signed form. The assumption is that both the spoken and signed forms correspond to English which is what Winston demonstrates is not happening and cannot happen (Winston 1989).

⁷ In mainstream programs Deaf students attend a public school with the services of an interpreter for classroom instruction.

variation between ASL interpreted and transliterated target texts from the same spoken English source text as presented by the same professional interpreting model. Their study provides a rare glimpse of the interpreter's different ways of saying the same thing in two variations of signing and while engaged in the free or literal ends of the interpreting continuum.

Collins (1993, 2004) has examined Tactile ASL⁸ (TASL) and Deaf Blind interpretation.⁹ In his study of adverbial markers in TASL, he makes clear that TASL and ASL variation exists. Haas, Fleetwood, and Ernst (1995), and Author, Fleetwood, and Collins (2004) examine TASL conversation regulators and Deaf Blind interpretation (respectively) as issues related to variation in interpretation. Perhaps the study of TASL, even more than the study of English-like signing varieties, offers an informative glimpse into the tacit understanding of language variation held by interpreters, and the manner in which variation is manifested in their work.

Contrasted performances

In addition to the study of literal interpreting and of TASL interpreting, some studies examine two or more interpreters and compare their ways of saying the same thing (as controlled by a source text). For example, Tray (2005) conducts an examination of innuendo in ASL by comparing a native signer's rendition versus a non-native signer's interpretation of innuendo within an English source text. Using a script, *Princess Plays with Wood*, both native signers and interpreters choose strategies that displayed the literal meaning, yet also conveyed the sexual innuendo behind both words and sentences.

Similarly, Santiago and Barrick (2007) also examine how interpreters deal with translating source language idioms into ASL by comparing the different choices interpreters exhibited when conveying the same idioms. Overall the interpreters tended to render plain language target texts while native signers used more figurative language

Variation issues pertain to interpretation in numerous ways. Variation within a single interpreter as they translate a source text into varieties of sign is but one example discussed above. Analysing the ways in which a variety of interpreters translate a single source text provides another example of how interpreting studies address the question of variation. Finally, examination of varieties of ASL, including contact sign, English-like signing, and Tactile ASL as they appear in the work of interpreters also reflects aspects of the sociolinguistic nature of interpretation.

Language policy and planning

According to Reagan (2010), language policy and planning is an area of sociolinguistic inquiry relevant to both spoken and signed language communities, focusing on such relevant aspects of social and education as language status, reform, and revitalization.

Language policy and planning pertains to signed language interpretation in numerous ways, beginning with interpreters working with deaf youth, as in medical and educational settings, and subsequently with these youth throughout their lives and into adulthood, using the language or variant that language planners and policy makers may have imposed upon them.

Further, language policies are often directly aimed at interpreters themselves. This could take the form of regulating whether or not

⁸ Tactile ASL is a variety of ASL used by Deaf-Blind persons in which one interlocutor signs while the other interlocutor puts one hand over one of the signing hand of the other.

⁹ Deaf-Blind interpreting involves people who are both deaf and blind and thus must have someone who can communicate using Tactile ASL (TASL) in which everything must be communicated via touch.

interpreters hold professional credentials and qualifications. It could also take the form of stipulating which settings and in what capacity interpreters may or may not provide services (Napier, 2008). It could even take the form of stipulating interpreters' work environment, resulting in the potential for occupational hazards for interpreters and, therefore, impacting on the availability of interpreters for deaf and hearing community members.

Interpreter-mediated learning

LaBue (1998) conducted the first major, in-depth study on the impact of learning through an interpreter. Around the United States, Deaf students are in classrooms where social and academic information is presented in spoken English, requiring the use of a sign language interpreter. Learning academic content in this manner raises complex linguistic and educational issues about how deaf students learn, or fail to learn.

LaBue's study included filming ten class lectures and discussions, observation and field notes, and interviews with the teacher, students, and the interpreter. From transcripts and live data, a sociolinguistic analysis was performed of the context and linguistic form of one teacher's spoken, literacy-related instructional discourse and an interpreter's rendition of that discourse.

The interpreter in this study was herself a teacher of deaf students and had no training as an interpreter. This, unfortunately, is a situation that holds true in public schools all over the United States. Consequently, she did not lag behind the teacher's talk enough and often created ungrammatical and incomprehensible renditions of the teacher's talk. She failed to create discourse markers and other cohesive devices, such as repetition and pronominal use, so that tracking topic changes and shifts was difficult, if not impossible.

Because no one prepared the teacher for having deaf students in class, the turn taking was governed by auditory cues, and deaf students were excluded from participation cues that might have allowed their participation in classroom discussions. Moreover, this affected the teacher's evaluation of the deaf students; for example, she described one of the students as "immature" rather than recognizing the student might be performing as a second language learner of English.

Additional studies of interpreters working in educational settings focus on a variety of language and policy-related topics, including not only the interpreter's role in a classroom (see also Harrington, 2005), but also the impact of coded sign systems on language learning (cf. Stack 2004; Winston 2004); the impact on sociocultural development of students through learning in a mediated (interpreted) learning situation versus direct instruction (Schick, 2004); and the lack of educational preparation for educational interpreters and its corresponding impact on both interpreters and students (see Langer, 2004; Schick, 2004; and Winston, 2004).

Policy and cultural dimension

Although beyond the nature of language use itself, the policies related to communication, language, and to the provision of and care of interpreters' health all represent policy and planning issues that have an impact on the lives of a linguistic community. Madden (2005) explores the prevalence of chronic occupational physical injury among Australian Sign Language interpreters due to the stress created by constant demand and the lack of recognition of their professional rights.

Finally, as language professionals making on-the-job decisions in real time, interpreters themselves are often faced with situated encounters in which they make individual decisions of a possibly small-scale policy and planning nature. In a recent turn in sociolinguistic studies (McKee &

Awheto, 2010), researchers are collaborating with practitioners as they reflect upon their work – the continuous struggle to make appropriate choices for communicative success in multilingual, multicultural settings.

These retrospections are tape-recorded interviews/discussions between the authors soon after the event. They treat the tape transcript as data that they analyse to explore how the practitioners contributed to producing the event from various positions as an interpreter. They focus on themes such as co-constructing the event, language challenges, the importance of social identity, and responsibilities invoked by the interpreter's cultural allegiance.

These issues can manifest themselves in any interpreting situation, ranging from those involving deaf children to those involving trilingual interpreters working with indigenous Deaf people. For example, Locker-McKee and Awheto (2010) show:

how the interpreter, from her own cultural position as a trilingual Māori woman, responds to the sociocultural dimensions of the event in negotiating her role. Her macro-level awareness of peoples' intentions, identities, and varying cultural schemas for the event determine the way in which she mediates interaction, often motivating her to take participant positions that depart from the 'normative' interpreter role (p. 87).

Together, they examined how the interpreter negotiated her position as an interpreter in a trilingual situation involving hearing, Deaf, Māori, and Pākehā¹⁰ participants with disparate cultural schemas and discourse repertoires. Their analysis of Awheto's explanations of her actions and behaviours highlighted her highly visible position and her multiple footings as the interaction unfolded. The interpreter's concern for protecting the integrity of the cultural norms of all the participants was moving. Thus, at times, she positioned herself as a mediator, "encouraging each party to make their perspectives more explicit to the other, in order to mitigate potential social damage within and beyond the event" (2010, p. 113).

This case reinforces that it is impossible to neutralize the impact of an interpreter's personal cultural orientation and identity on the way in which she negotiates her roles in a given interaction. The interpreter's decisions in mediating communication in this situation were clearly shaped by her own enculturation, her ethnic alliance with, and social network knowledge of, other participants, and were promoted by her tri-cultural perception of the gap between parties in knowing how to construct this particular event together.

Whether examining an interpreter's choices at work, the regulations or expectations that impact upon an interpreter's physical well-being while at work, or policies that affect the communities with whom interpreters work, language policy and planning play an integral and daily role in the professional lives of signed language interpreters.

Language attitudes

Interpretation is by its very nature a language-centred social activity. Attitudes about language are difficult to separate from attitudes about interpreters themselves. In this section we describe several studies that examine this phenomenon.

Forestal (2005) investigates the shifting attitudes of Deaf leaders toward signed language interpreters. Forestal notes how older leaders think of

¹⁰ Māori people are indigenous New Zealanders, and Pākehā people are non-Māori New Zealanders of European ancestry.

interpreters as their friends in exchanges, whereas Deaf individuals who attended mainstream schools possessed different feelings about interpreting.

Napier and Rohan (2007) investigate interpreting from the perspective of deaf consumers in Australia to explore their agenda for quality interpreting services. They found that general satisfaction levels are high among Deaf consumers, even though they seem to have little choice about who will interpret. For these consumers, the key factors for working with interpreters include understanding the consumer and the context, professionalism, and attitude.

Also, attitudes of interpreters themselves – be they hearing or deaf, signers as L1 or L2 – are reflected in the language choices that they make while at work. For example Stone (2010) finds in his study of Deaf interpreters working in public media such as television, that Deaf interpreters and hearing interpreters have a qualitatively different product as a result, in part, of different attitudes about what constitutes discourse, its meaning, and the translation thereof.

Stone concentrated his research in the United Kingdom. Specifically, he examined the rendering of English broadcast television news into British Sign Language (BSL) by both Deaf and hearing T/Is. Segments of the data feature simultaneous Deaf and hearing in-vision T/I broadcasts. Recording these broadcasts produced a controlled product that enabled direct comparison of the Deaf and hearing T/Is. Close analysis of these examples revealed to Stone that Deaf T/Is not only employ a Deaf translation norm, they also take labours to shape their BSL text into a stand-alone product rather than a translation.

Language attitudes can also be reflected in the attitudes that consumers may hold regarding interpreters. Studies of these attitudes have focused on those of deaf students (see Kurz & Langer, 2004), Deaf leaders (Forestal 2005), and even on the attitudes of Deaf consumers regarding the nature of the service, such as whether it is an interpretation or a more literal transliteration (e.g., Livingston, Singer, & Abramson, 1995; Napier & Rohan, 2007).

Language attitude research has taken many forms in the sociolinguistic examination of language users, be they mono-, bi-, or multilingual. The varying practices of interpreters (such as Deaf or hearing interpreters, native signing versus non-native signing interpreters, and so forth) reflect language attitudes held by interpreters who work as language professionals as well as the attitudes of the consumers of interpretation.

It is worth noting that, similarly, the language attitudes of interpreters as embodied in their interpretations undoubtedly also inform the attitudes held by consumers of interpreting about the interpreters with whom they work.

Interpreting as a sociolinguistic activity

In this paper we have attempted to demonstrate that, by its very nature, interpreting is a sociolinguistic activity. We have provided evidence by selecting SLI studies (while recognizing that we have not included all possible studies and especially not studies written in languages other than English) from a growing body of interpreting research, that sociolinguistic concerns relating to discourse analysis, bilingualism, multilingualism, and language contact, language variation, language policy and planning, and language attitudes all constitute aspects of the processes and products of signed language interpretation.

It is worth noting that many sociolinguistic studies of interpretation do not fit neatly into one or another subfield of sociolinguistics. For example, Napier's (2003) study of omissions applies a sociolinguistic analysis, yet

also represents a study of variation in the target interpretations of a number of professional interpreters. Similarly, many studies addressing these topics have been undertaken by researchers from outside the sociolinguistic sphere.

For example, Schick and Williams (2004) describe a large-scale study of the competencies held by educational interpreters and make an excellent case regarding language policy and planning involving both practitioner qualifications and those in education affecting student outcomes, yet their work is not necessarily steeped in sociolinguistic-inspired methodology.

In short, sociolinguistic concerns are such an integral part of interpretation that relevant sociolinguistic areas are being studied by a variety of researchers from diverse and interdisciplinary backgrounds. Just as the study of sociolinguistic issues as they pertain to interpreting have a great potential to impact interpreting practice and pedagogy, the study of interpreters and interpretation has much potential to contribute to our understanding of sociolinguistics and the sociolinguistics of deaf communities.

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