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Telephone interpreting: Understanding practice and identifying research needs

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Abstract: This paper looks at the fast growing but vastly under-researched area of telephone interpreting (henceforth TI), within the context of the radical changes in telephony in recent decades. It examines what has been established in our knowledge of the TI field and where further research is needed, both for technological issues but perhaps even more pertinently for practice issues. The scattered research effort so far has given us a patchy picture of TI, with inconsistent or uncertain findings on basic questions such as how interpreters and other participants coordinate discourse via telephone, or the use of first or third person, as well as more technical issues of the extent of use of mobile vs. fixed-line phones, or which set-ups of TI are most effective. The research effort is hampered by abiding stereotypes of TI as an inferior form of interpreting, and by the lack of a theoretical basis for further exploration. Suggestions are made for starting points methodologically and theoretically to address such shortcomings.
Few areas of interpreting have seen the radical impact of technology as much as has telephone interpreting. From a generally small and somewhat marginalised part in overall language service provision, albeit important in emergency situations, TI has been the basis for the growth of some of the largest companies in the interpreting field, has crossed national boundaries to reveal truly global markets, and has witnessed a multiplicity of providers where previously a single provider in any country was the norm.
As yet, research on this phenomenon, or serious theoretical or pedagogical analysis, has not kept pace with business advances in TI. This paper sets out some of the needed areas of research to fully comprehend this now global phenomenon of TI growth. It will also show that technological issues of telephony are intimately connected to issues of interpreting technique, ethics, and interpreter role.

Keywords: telephone interpreting; telephony; technology; discourse; interpreters; Sign Language interpreting; spoken language interpreting

1. Setting the scene – Slow growth; one TIS in each country

From the first Telephone Interpreting Service (TIS) established in 1973 by the Immigration Department in Australia, TI spread slowly, with predominantly one major service in each country – in Europe (e.g. the Netherlands, Sweden) this tended to be a public sector organisation, in the UK it was a charity-led social enterprise, while in the USA the community-initiated Language Line, begun in 1981, became a private corporation (Kelly 2008, p.5ff).

An accompanying feature over the 1980s to 1990s was the increased use of TI by some institutions (e.g. hospitals) who utilised TI with their *in-house* staff, thus avoiding lengthy walking from clinic to clinic or ward to ward, or contracting outside agencies (Angelelli 2004).

Telephone interpreting at that time reflected the state of telephony: services tended to operate out of central call centres attended by the interpreters, at least in the major languages; lesser demand languages were sourced from off-site interpreters. Phone call costs were high in countries which had timed local calls, and long-

distance calls were expensive, placing an emphasis on sourcing local interpreters. This resulted in relatively slow growth and innovation in TI, until telephony itself started to radically change as a field from the mid-1990s, seeing a corresponding growth in TI.

1.1 The telephony revolution

The recent significant increase of TI needs to be seen in the context of the even more dramatic rise of telephony as a major contributor to economic growth and its transformation from a necessary but highly regulated and monopolised aspect of national infrastructure, to a market characterised by diversity, massive global interpenetration and radical innovation.

Two features here are critical. First, the rise of mobile telephony (and now internet-based voice and image carrying capacity) has transformed telephone usage and market organisation. This is the aspect of telephony change perhaps most noticeable to the general public. Where it may have made sense once to see fixed line telephone provision, with its massive infrastructure costs, as a natural monopoly heavily controlled by governments around the world, the advent of mobile telephony, internet telephony and other innovations have led to deregulated markets. Yet interestingly, while the advent of mobile telephony has had some impact on TI, this has been less than the impact of the changing economics of fixed-line telephony.

By far the most important innovation that has supported TI has been the second major change in recent decades – the steep fall in the price of telephony, particularly fixed-line telephony. This has come about partly from the rise of mobile telephony, partly from greater competition in provision and deregulation, and partly from greater capacity of new technologies (fibre optics, broadband provision, etc) to carry simple fixed line telephone connections at far lower rates among all other channels carried. As Herbert Ungerer, of the Directorate-General of Competition of the European Commission has argued, this combination of factors

> has effectively taken distance out of the telephony pricing structure, with a dramatic fall of voice telephony long distance and international rates – with Voice over the Internet now at the end of this process. (Ungerer, 2005, p.5)

This feature has liberated telephone interpreting from being an essentially local and very expensive exercise to one able to source both clients and interpreters beyond the confines of local telephone networks; sourcing has become at least national and in many cases international.

1.2 Large and small TI services

A direct effect of this technological and economic shift has been the development of TI services in two distinct directions. First, we have seen the growth of extremely large operators – of which Language

Line in the USA is only the largest. In their monitoring of translating and interpreting markets, Kelly & DePalma (2009) found several global TI operators with large capitalisation – their list of the top fifteen TI companies is given in Table 1.

Rank	**Company**	**Country of HQ**	**TI revenue US$M**	**Status**
1	Languages Line Services*	USA	236.39	Private
2	Cyracom	USA	24.80	Private
3	Manpower Business Solutions	Netherlands	20.93	Public
4	Thebigword Group	UK	19.70	Private
5	Pacific Interpreters	USA	19.50	Private
6	Language Services Associates	USA	18.5	Private
7	Semantix*	Sweden	15.02	Private
8	Telelanguage	USA	15.00	Private
9	Certified Languages International	USA	10.0	Private
10	LLE	USA	7.00	Private
11	CanTalk	Canada	5.60	Private
12	LyricLabs	India	2.80	Private
13	ISM Interprétariat	France	2.74	Private
14	Lionbridge	USA	2.40	Public
15	CTS Language Link	USA	2.00	Private

* Estimated

Table 1. Top 15 Telephone Interpreting Suppliers

Source: Kelly and DePalma, 2009, p.1

The revenue figures here are for TI revenue only – several of these companies also offer translation or on-site interpreting. The ‘Public’ category here means publicly listed companies (*not* public sector organisations); ‘Private’ covers many different kinds of organisations – many are commercial companies not publicly listed, but the French ISM Interprétariat is a non-profit organisation supported by charity and government as well as fees for service, while the Swedish Semantix is a commercial company that absorbed the privatised former Immigration Ministry public sector language services.

A curious omission from this table is Australia’s Translating & Interpreting Service (TIS) which is the original telephone interpreting service, established in 1973, and is still run by Australia’s Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), one of a handful of language services that has withstood corporatisation or privatisation (Ozolins, Pointon & Doucouliagos, 2002). Providing close to a million TI assignments a year, according to its 2009-2010 Annual Report, any estimate of its TI revenue would place it in second place after Language Line; however, ‘revenue’ is perhaps a misleading indicator as around half of its TI services are provided free of charge to users and covered by DIAC: those receiving free services include private medical practitioners, pharmacies, non-government organisations providing settlement services to newly arrived migrants, Members of Parliament, trade unions and local government authorities. The reason for the omission of TIS is not clear.

If the rise of extremely large TI companies has been one outcome of the growth of TI, then at the other end of the spectrum, the lowering of costs and advances in telephony infrastructure has meant that many small companies and agencies can afford to add TI to their already established repertoire of translation and/or on-site interpreting; even the smallest agencies have the capacity to engage in TI. The familiar picture up to the mid-1990s, where one TI service dominated in a particular country, has radically changed.

1.3 Is technology the driver?

The changes in telephony already outlined have impacted on TI companies, but not always in predictable ways. Contrary to some suppositions, mobile telephony has not become the dominant way of conducting TI assignments. The coming of the mobile telephone *has* had an impact on TI companies, but in another direction – in the steadily rising cost of companies communicating with interpreters for other, usually administrative purposes.

Many of the larger companies will rarely allow their interpreters to interpret over mobile phones. This stems from a mix of concerns covering quality of voice, confidentiality and cost. Quality of voice is ensured by using landline phones; in the most organised companies, employees will often have a work-station, either centrally located in a call centre or in a home office, with headphones and ideally access to a computer for reference purposes (in rare cases also access to interpreting using Voice Over Internet Protocol [VOIP]).

Ethical concerns over confidentiality relate to the unpredictability of where an interpreter may be if using a mobile phone, including public places, while handling potentially sensitive material; when companies stress the confidentiality of their operations in their publicity, the need to ensure they know exactly where their interpreters are working from becomes even more important (Kelly 2008, pp.91-2). Some emergency situations may call for a relaxation of such rules in particular instances.

There is no necessary uniformity here; some agencies (and TI is almost always directed through agencies, with rare direct interpreter-client work sourcing) may be more inclined to allow mobile telephones than others, but preference for landlines is near-universal. An exception may also be where an exasperated booking clerk for an agency is finding it difficult to locate a landline interpreter in a particular language and puts the assignment through to a willing interpreter on a mobile phone.

The interlinked issues of cost and mobile telephony affect TI companies in two ways. First, in almost all jurisdictions mobile calls are more expensive than landline. This cost advantage is made even more apparent where landline telephone calls are not timed, or can be bought at a massive discount rate for volume; in these cases allowing extensive interpreting over mobile phones becomes prohibitively expensive.

Second, unrelated to the isue of using mobile phones for interpreting, the prevalance of mobile phones also raises costs in

contacting interpreters to ascertain availability for work (this also in relation to bookings for on-site interpreting). To counter this, there is much use of SMS for booking purposes particularly for on-site assignments, or use of on-line booking systems; however, where a quick response for a TI assignment is needed, the usual method will be to call an interpreter on their mobile phone.

While some companies (again the larger ones) may have many dedicated interpreters on location with fixed-line phones, this is likely to be the case only with the larger demand languages; this will decreasingly be the case in middle or lower demand languages, where for the most part interpreters will fit in TI work around other assignments or responsibilities (Lee, 2007). In some cases such often peripatetic interpreters may be away from their landline for extended periods.

In examining forces that are determining new policy outcomes for interpreting services, Ozolins (2010) argued that increasing linguistic diversity was one of the most important constant factors currently challenging service provision. The increased flows of migration around the world, the increase in the number of asylum-seekers and historical pull-push factors are bringing to all countries (not only the economically most advanced), populations increasingly diverse in their language make-up. The challenges faced by language services include finding interpreters at all, ensuring elementary standards in performance, and endeavouring to instil a sense of professionalism. The very specific situation in the USA with Spanish as the majority minorty language is refered to again below.

1.4 Telephone interpreting and interpreting technique

The questions of the effectivenss of TI and the impact that TI has on interpreting technique are crucial questions to address, but three factors make them difficult to answer, and show the still restricted understanding of TI as a distinctive sphere in the interpreting field. The first factor is the patchy way in which TI has been analysed as an activity so far, usually only in small-scale studies, leaving us with scattered research into practice. The second factor is the persistence of (usually unsubstantiated) myths and stereotypes of TI which seem to stymie professional debate on the field; and the third is the difficulty of clarifying theoretical or methodological underpinnings to research effort into TI.

2. Current analyses of telephone interpreting

First, the lack of attention to TI as compared to say, conference or health or court interpreting, means there has been little conceptual or empirical work that would justify strong conclusions about the effectiveness of TI or the links between technique and technology. The few extant studies do not provide a coherent picture.

In an attempt to provide some empirical basis for understanding TI, Rosenberg (2007) in the USA analysed his own yearly TI caseload

of 1,876 English-Spanish assignments, and tied this in with both other studies of TI (Oviatt & Cohen, 1992; Wadensjö, 1999) and studies of generic differences between telephone conversations and face-to-face conversations (Hopper 1992). In his corpus of calls, some two-thirds were medical and one-third commercial. Rosenberg argues that TI interactions are indeed unique, not because of linguistic differences between telephone and face-to-face communication, but rather that many of the most salient characteristics in interpreter-mediated telephone communication are the product of the complexity of the situational, extra-linguistic factors that intervene as a result of the expanding access to the interpreter (Rosenberg, 2007, p.66).

The most salient extra-linguistic factor he identifies is the use of TI in situations where the Spanish speaker is not at all familiar with TI, and is moreover often unaware of the institutional context they are connected to, whether government agency or commercial company. As a result of this disorientation on the part of the Spanish-speaker, TI does not follow "the idealised, conduit model of interpreting, but rather the interpreter is an active participant in the conversation as is the case in many community settings" (p.67).

This perspective also allows him to offer a critique of the other studies cited: Oviatt & Cohen (1992) in an experimental TI study, showed the high usage of of the third person in TI, and the higher rates of request for confirmation in TI as against non-interpreted talk. He also cites Wadensjö's 1999 study comparing TI to face-to-face interpreting by the same interpreter on the same immigration case, in which she concludes that TI results in less smooth interpreting and greater problems with overlapping speech.

Rosenberg does not accept the findings of these studies. Apart from being based on very small samples, he criticises them for they "seem to assume that all telephone interpreted calls are basically alike and that their particular problems arise as a result of some supposed inherent differences with face-to face speech events" (p.67). Rosenberg uses Hopper (1992) to show how generic telephone encounters and face-to-face conversations are more similar than different both in terms of linguistic input and outcomes, despite the lack of visual input in the case of telephone conversations.

However, for Rosenberg it is not only the disorientation of the Spanish speaker that causes difficulty for TI; technical factors also impinge. His work examined one question which related technology to interpreting difficulty: what mode of TI was employed. He categorised three modes of TI:

- Three-way telephone conversations where all three parties are on separate phones (55% of his sample). Rosenberg argues this is by far the least problematic, given that all interlocutors (Client 1, Client 2 and Interpreter) are on an equal footing and needing to establish turn-taking and orderly management of the call (p.72).
- Face-to-face conversations between two primary participants using a speaker-phone intrepreted by a remote telephone interpreter (39%). This situation posed the greatest

problems in relation to sound quality, often because of background noise, and sometimes problems in hearing (especially backchanneling or one-syllable responses).

- Telephone passing (3.7% calls), where the primary participants are together but a telephone is passed between them; Rosenberg describes this as “two parallel conversations in which the interpreter is being used as an emissary” (p.73). In the worst situations, long lists of questions may not all be answered or be interrupted by new questions, or the phone is yanked away before an interpretation has finished.

Rosenberg’s categories give us some grip on crucial technique issues, for example use of first or third person in TI. He reports that in his three-way conversations, third person is used some 82% of the time, but this rises to 85% for speakerphone interpreting and 100% for situations where the telephone is passed between parties (p.73). It should be noted that Rosenberg here is reporting his own practice, not that of other telephone interpreters.

From Rosenberg’s perspective, TI presents greater challenges than face-to-face interpreting, but this is largely because of contextual difficulties, including the range of situations encountered – banking or finance or insurance one minute, various fields of medicine the next – and remoteness in terms of reference to local events, facilities or persons. He thus calls for a reorientation of research, as a way of overcoming the prejudice against TI:

> Future research should study how semantic field effects interpreter accuracy, how the interpreter’s physical distance and lack of a shared frame of reference can make interpreting far more difficult. Unlike those investigators who want to see something inherent in telephone communication that renders it linguistically unsuitable for quality interpretation, greater emphasis should be placed on the extra linguistic, situational demands being placed on interpreters who are suddenly being made available to a vast and hetereogenous population of non-English speaking clients (Rosenberg, p.75).

Contextual issues of an additional kind are identified by Lee (2007) in her survey of twenty Korean telephone interpreters in Sydney, Australia. She surveys the available literature in very similar terms to Rosenberg, drawing particular attention to Oviatt and Cohen (1992) who, Lee recounts, argued that interpreters “took considerable initiative in turn management and organising the flow of the dialogue… [and] suggest that the telephone interpreter was assuming an independent agent’s role to achieve the goal of communication” (Lee, 2007, p.233). Yet Lee points out that her own sample of telephone interpreters were more ambivalent on their role and the degree of intervention and coordination.

Lee’s sample divided evenly between interpreters in the Australian system accredited at the professional level by the National

Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI), and those accredited at the lower paraprofessional level (www.naati.com.au). They were mostly female and predominantly had one to five years of interpreting experience. As a group they found TI offers both attractions and challenges: convenience (no travel) and flexibility of time figured strongly as attractions, with a small number also seeing no face to face contact as an attraction. By contrast, by far the most mentioned challenge was precisely the lack of face-to-face contact; technical problems and inconvenience were also mentioned as challenges by some. Half the sample indicated they believed remuneration for TI was poor.

The very divided attitude to TI is reflected in the issue of first or third person interpreting: Lee reports that 40% of her informants claim they use first person, 15% always use third person, while 45% mix first and third person. Lee senses this is a real confusion, as she assesses that the telephone interpreters seem to be less than confident about their choice of third person over the phone, perhaps because the first-person interpreting principle is strongly entrenched in the interpreting industry and in interpreter education as a benchmark of professional practice (Lee, 2007, pp.248-249).

This lack of confidence and uncertainty means the ovewhelming feeling evinced towards TI was one of a degree of frustration and lack of satisfaction, and there was no common view of what their role should be in telephone exchanges. One interpreter commented that “I tend to stick more to a passive interpreter’s role in telephone interpreting because I can’t tell easily if they misunderstood, because face-to-face contact does not exist” (Lee, 2007, p.246).

Yet other respondents indicated they do intervene, and Lee carefully summarises:

> Most tend to assume the additional task of managing the communication. When they face a problem or misunderstanding, they often intervene by offering an explanation or even gently pushing the primary parties, usually the Korean speakers, to achieve the goal of communication successfully and efficiently (p.248).

Yet again, as with choice of first or third person, the interpreters reveal indecision and some confusion over intervention, contrasting this practice with their code of ethics: one interpreter commented “I feel I deviate from the professional ethics when I try to explain to make sure they understand” (Lee, 2007, p.245).

Lee concludes that her participants have a very low estimation of the profession of TI, with little commitment expressed, and TI remaining almost a backwater to their face-to-face interpreting work and interpreting identity:

> While the cost-effectiveness and convenience of telephone interpreting may be a major attraction for service users, it appears to have taken a toll on the morale of the interpreters themselves. Half of those questioned do not

think highly of it as a profession, and have considered quitting telephone interpreting. The results suggest that this lukewarm attitude toward telephone interpreting is largely related to the low remuneration, as well as the challenges (p.248).

Lee's interpreters find TI to be a marked and almost unwelcome form of interpreting, and clearly differentiate it from face-to-face interpreting. But this is not the case with other studies that incorporatre TI in their corpus of interpreted events. Angelelli's (2004) study of interpreters in a large California hospital is one of the sharpest and perhaps most controversial ethnographic studies of interpreting *in situ*: in that hospital, interpreters spend a large part of their time interpreting over the telephone in-house from their office, as well as attending face-to-face interviews, yet issues of TI are scarcely mentioned in the book. And while Angelelli, to be fair, is most concerned with other crucial issues of interpreting such as role and performance, she completely neglects to identify any issues at all arising from the nature of telephone interpreting; she treats all interpreting situations whether face-to-face or by telephone as largely unmarked cases, sometimes mentioning which of her often striking interpreting examples are conducted over the telephone and which are face to face, but otherwise making no mention of any aspect of TI. For her purposes, in the hospital setting there is no difference between TI and face-to-face interpreting.

Such a research history - with different authors putting quite different emphasis on various aspects of TI (first/third person; the queston of visuals; modes of TI setup; remuneration; discourse; commitment) – rather than giving us a good overall picture of TI, has resulted in no study being replicated and potential hypotheses raised never being tested in other studies. These issues of incomplete research agendas will be addressed again below.

3. Stereotypes of telephone interpreting

A second factor that makes it difficult to give clear conclusions about TI, is that the lack of empirical research has meant much of the debate about TI remains at a stereotypical level, with accusations (often unidentified) of serious shortcomings in TI (e.g. Rosenberg, 2007, p.75) barely answered by the few serious studies.

Kelly (2008) – in what is still the only monograph-length treatment of TI – weighs into such stereotypes: she cites five 'myths' about TI, though again there is no identification of where such myths are promulgated or by whom. The myths mostly relate to issues of quality, and claims that TI is deficient because of:

- Lack of non-verbal information
- No screening of interpreters
- No concern for quality

- Desire to replace on-site interpreting
- Lack of confidentiality

On the issue of non-verbal information, Kelly strongly asserts the degree of understanding that can be gained by telephone – as witnessed by the way telephone interpreters often develop very acute listening skills, or the ability of blind interpreters to adequately perform interpreting tasks. Moreover, Kelly points to the advantages of TI, citing several examples where interpreters because of racial, disability or other personal features are often disadvantaged or treated in negative ways when they undertake face-to-face interpreting. Kelly warns that:

> Current arguments against telephone interpreting are largely based on opinion. Proper research should be conducted in order to yield a fair assessment of the distinctions and preferable venues for on-site and telephone interpreting (2008, p.87).

Are there situations where on-site interpreting is preferable to TI? Yes, claims Kelly. However, the reasons are related more to the needs of certain groups of speakers and equipment than to the telephone medium itself; Kelly argues that TI should not be used in situations involving "children, the elderly, the hard of hearing, and the mentally ill" (2008, p.87). In terms of equipment, Kelly warns against the use of speakerphones, which transmit too much ambient noise: "dual handset phone equipment is preferable" (2008, p.87). Yet even in these less than optimal conditions, Kelly notes, TI may be all that is available and can make communication possible.

Lack of confidentiality is sometimes raised as an issue where interpreters conduct assignments in locations where they may be overheard by others, most commonly now by using mobile phones. Yet, in a curious and perhaps singular omission in her monograph, Kelly does not mention the use of mobile phones except as an unidentified criticism of TI; she repeatedly stresses that reputable TI companies insist on interpreters working from call-centre-like environments, either in company premises or home offices (2008, pp.91-92). This may well be the case for many, and some of the largest companies, but across the field even elementary data collection on use of landline or mobiles is not available in solid studies.

It should be noted that Kelly writes largely about the most sophisticated of the TI service providers in the USA, particularly the vanguard Language Line. There we find a TI organisation with a very large workforce, operating predominantly through call centres or specifically equipped home offices, with extensive training requirements, clear protocols of handling calls, and extensive back up and support services. In the absence of a national certification system for interpreters, this organisation, as with some other larger TI companies, has its own systems of general and specialised certification. This presents a picture of TI that is about as far away

from Lee's demoralised and isolated telephone interpreters as one can get.

A fundamental issue here is not only the size of the USA market, which permits significant economies of scale and market concentration, but also the particular situation of having Spanish as a majority minority language, dwarfing all other language demands, and allowing considerable focus of effort in sourcing interpreters and imposing standards. To this extent also the USA situation may not always equate with that of many other countries where a far more multilingual population, with no dominant minority language, makes standards across the field more difficult to monitor and enforce. Around the world, TI practice and experience may still look more like Lee's and Wadensjö's examples than Kelly's recounting of the practice of exemplary companies.

4. Unexamined research questions; undiscovered theory

The issues identified so far reveal areas ripe for further exploration, and the size of the enterprise behoves a more systematic building of knowledge of the field. One methodological and one theoretical point can be made here.

Methodologically, few of the studies give any worthwhile background on the telephone interpreters studied, or their qualifications. Only Lee mentions accreditation. In a field where standard variables such as qualifications of the interpreter or familiarity of users with interpreting are usually not considered, it may be an arguable proposition that any variation or inadequacy found in TI may be largely explained by looking at i) the qualifications and experience of the interpreters, and ii) the unfamiliarity of the participating parties with TI. However, Kelly (2008) usefully makes the point that not all interpreters experienced in face-to-face interpreting will necessarily do well in TI, and argues that many interpreters used to having visual clues will have to unlearn this for working in TI; she also claims some interpreters who have little experience in face-to-face-interpreting but are trained specifically for TI can excel in TI even without other interpreting experience. Currently, generic accreditation or certification sytems do not include components of TI in their testing or training regimes; Lee's accredited interpreters may well have qualifications and skills enabling them to work effectively as face-to-face interpreters but they clearly struggle with TI. We have not yet begun to expolore the relationship between competence in face-to-face interpreting and competence in TI.

Beyond methodological points, questions arise as to whether the study of TI can have a theoretical basis, an underpinning perspective that precisely delineates its essential features and ties this in to its technological environment. Perhaps the best attempt at this so far comes from the Sign Language (SL) field, where Pollitt & Haddon and colleagues (2005) look at the issue of an interpreter, located with a deaf person, making a telephone call for that person. Significantly, the authors make use of the considerable research done on standard

telephone conversations, i.e. telephone conversations not being interpreted. They consider the various roles a telephone user may adopt (decision-maker, telephone operator, relay conveyor of messages, author of messages) on the one hand, and the need for a SL interpreter to convey in a telephone conversation that they are not primarily authoring, but *interpreting*, for a deaf person who is never heard by the hearing speaker at the other end.

The social dimension of this is important. Pollitt & Haddon correctly identify broader changes in telephony where "the use of the telephone for the provision of services is spreading", and point to the growth of *transactional* phone calls (p.188). In linguistics they cite this as having been identified by Fairclough as the "conversationalisation of public discourse" (p.196). These developments create more problematic communication scenarios for the deaf, who become dependant upon and threatened by the telephone and the 'culture of sound', but by extension this raises problems for any minority language speaker, as institutions increasingly demand consumers and clients communicate by telephone. More abstractly, this can be seen as a *revenge of the mainstream*, where minority language speakers who may well be able to communicate somewhat in the dominant language in a face-to-face encounter have to resort to a telephone to make an increasing proportion of household and personal transactions. (It will be important to observe if this trend to greater obligatory telephone use is affected by the capacity to now make many such transactions over the internet.)

Within the narrower questions of technique, Pollitt & Haddon point to the centrality of the question of what are expectations of the various parties, for in their case the hearing speaker "will expect the norms of telephone interaction to apply" (p.188). Likewise for spoken languages, the expectations of the hearing speaker will be crucial, albeit that in this case the speaker of the other language will be heard; but the function of the interpreter in this situation, as with the SL case, may at various points stretch across the various roles of operator, author and interpreter. Consideration of what the norms are for use of the telephone then gives us an essential starting point for analysing TI. Further, Pollitt & Haddon use Venuti's challenging theorising of how interpreters attempt to provide transparency and immediacy and recreate the norms of a conversation in one language, trying to "project a Utopian community that is not yet realized" (p.201) by use of the first person, giving the illusion of a direct conversation between two speakers. Yet, it is precisely the use of the first person that creates problems – in the SL situation and as we have seen, in spoken languages as well. Kelly's emphatic stricture that the telephone interpreter must always and only interpret in the first person (2008, p.119) can be usefully contrasted with Pollitt & Haddon's critique; we can in this case also see some theoretical advance on Wadensjö's (1998) now iconic distinction between *translation* and *coordination* in an interpreter's work: the tasks of coordination may be more complex and need to be more analytically distinguished in the TI environment.

Regarding coordination, one significant area of uncharted research can be identified. The increased use of telephones for

transactions stressed here also raises some unique ethical and practice issues that have been little studied. One issue that confronted this author from professional practice was a finding from a TI service that there was inconsistent interpreter practice on what to do while waiting on hold for calls to be put through from one level of operations to another, often in search of the correct worker or office to connect to. Kelly (2008, p.11ff) gives an account of what she regards as a typical TI assignment – a worker in some company receives a call from a minority language speaker and then that worker tries to connect (as rapidly as possible) to a TI service, so that the exchange can proceed. Yet very often the first port of call is not the relevant worker for a transaction – a caller by telephone (whether a minority or majority speaker) often has to navigate through a series of options (usually followed by waiting times) to get to the relevant worker. Also, as a variation of Kelly's model, there are constituencies in which speakers of minority languages can initiate TI calls, and where institutions and companies urge them to call the TI service first, so that they then ring the institution or company with an interpreter already connected.

In the relevant instance in the author's experience, it was found that if interpreters were spending a long time on hold with the minority language speaker, the latter would often inform the interpreter about what they were calling about, and upon finally being connected to the relevant worker, some interpreters would use this knowledge gained and, rather than interpret, brief the worker on what the call was about. In some cases this would also continue in an exchange between the worker and interpreter, until some course of action was reached or some new information was required where the interpreter again involved the minorty language speaker. The ethical problems of such practice are apparent, as in any other situation where the interpreter acts as spokesperson for the minority language speaker. Kelly covers this issue in one item in her proposed Code of Ethics for TI:

> 3(d) The telephone interpreter avoids engaging in side conversations. Even when the telephone interpreter is left alone with either party, the telephone interpreter refrains from becoming involved in conversations with that party (p.118).

Yet even if this be considered best possible advice, how does an interpreter 'refrain from becoming involved in conversations' when another participant is only too eager to talk, and what are the consequences if they do refrain? While this may be considered a general issue of what to do when interpreters are left alone with one participant, the occurrence of this on the telephone does raise specific issues relating to what the norms are for telephone discourse: talk between two parties holding on a telephone will occur, if only to reassure one another the other party is still there; moreover, refusing to partake in a conversation may carry more weight on a telephone that in a face-to-face situation where body language and positioning may do the work for the interpreter. Holding in silence is not comfortable, for either party. And sometimes there is not silence – being on hold may

mean one is subject to listening to music (presumably lessening the possiblity of conversation) but one may also be subject to recorded information items (does the interpreter, can the interpreter, interpret these?). Also, when some connection is made, navigation issues arise when this is a connection to a further menu of choices, presumably accurately interpreted by the interpreter, but where the minority speaker cannot ask the recorded menu for clarification of the options, as they could in a face-to-face session. Not providing clarification for often cryptic menu options again may place interpreters in a dilemma. Systematic studies are urgently needed both to provide a basic description of telephone interpreter behaviour in these waiting times, and to work through practice and ethical ramifications of different courses of action.

Finally, we can return briefly to the telephony/communications revolution and the future of TI. Kelly stresses that new advances particularly in video and digital technology may radically change current TI practices:

> Eventually … the notion of a telephone interpreter may be replaced by that of a remote interpreter. The end user will be able to control both video and audio feeds, thereby choosing to add visual cues when necessary, or perhaps eliminating them from certain scenarios if it seems that the disadvantages might outweigh the advantages. In fact, sight translation could be performed by the same remote interpreter through digital scanning and real-time text or instant messaging. With the support of emerging technology, there are many possibilities for revolutionising access to language services (2008, p.91).

Yet despite Kelly's vision, it is now a decade and a half since O'Hagan's ground-breaking work, whose title *The coming industry of teletranslation* (1996) was referring to then already *existing* technology. The take up of video technology has been impressive in the Sign Language area, but very limited for spoken languages. Moreover, all the functions mentioned in the above quotation, such as accessing texts for sight translation, have been with us at least since the advent of the fax machine, but have even in that context been relatively rarely used.

Just as the greatest changes in telephony in the last decades – the advent of mobile telephony, and the breaking down of monopolies – have not affected TI as much as has the simple fact of cheaper fixed line calls, so the enormous advances in digital and video technology have had only a tangential effect on TI and on interpreting generally. The combined effects of cost, expectations and logistics of users indicate that TI will continue to be the most likely medium for remote spoken language interpreting, making the research needs for this area even more pressing.

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