



Book Review

Crezee, Ineke (2013). *Introduction to healthcare for interpreters and translators*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins

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Interpreting is rather like scuba diving. With just a bit of protective equipment, we interpreters plunge for a short time into an often alien world, where a mistake can be very serious, not only for ourselves but for the other divers who are depending on us to understand their surroundings. And as all who dive, we interpreters find this daily foray into a new environment fascinating, exhilarating, but also at times, challenging. One of the high-risk dive sites into which we venture often is the sea of healthcare, where the strange whale-song of medical dialogue, the often incomprehensible behaviour of local denizens such as doctors, and the tricky currents of the healthcare system itself require special knowledge and skill to navigate successfully. Did you ever wish for a dive manual for the unique world of healthcare? Well, here's a good one, from linguist, RN and interpreter trainer, Dr Ineke Crezee of New Zealand.

Introduction to Healthcare for Interpreters and Translators, the updated version of Dr Crezee's original 1997 volume, is an excellent resource for language professionals working in healthcare settings. This is not a book to teach interpreting or translation per se, but an introduction to the complex world and vocabulary of health care, with a special view to the needs of interpreters and, to a lesser degree, translators. There are other books that introduce basic health concepts, but this is the first one written specifically with interpreters and translators in mind. This book will increase your health literacy and improve your confidence in your ability to understand what is going on around you as you interpret for a healthcare encounter.

Content

Part 1 of this book presents a quick overview of some issues in interpreting: a bit about the profession, the skills and knowledge that interpreters need to function well in healthcare settings, a discussion of the importance of understanding culture in order to fully understand language, and an introduction to the structure of medical terminology. The section provides a good review for interpreters who have been (or are being) introduced to these topics in basic training.

The real treasure of this book, however, is found in parts 2 and 3. Part 2 takes the reader on a tour of the Western healthcare system, providing a map of the world of primary care, specialty care, inpatient care and emergency care. Here Dr Crezee introduces the reader to the different professionals who work in these settings and to the common protocols and procedures in each. Especially valuable are the listings of likely questions that interpreters can expect in

various healthcare interactions, providing interpreters with a wonderful opportunity for practice and preparation. This section also includes a special treatment of obstetrics, neonatal care, paediatrics, speech therapy, mental health and oncology.

Part 3 is an introduction to the many specialty areas of health care. Each chapter focuses on information specific to a particular specialty: Latin and Greek roots, anatomy, physiology, treating professionals, common disorders, medications and procedures. This approach is especially useful in familiarising interpreters with the healthcare culture, as this is how medical professionals think about their work (“I’m a gastroenterologist”), how medical centres map out their physical plant (“The appointment will take place in the GI clinic”), and how interpreting assignments are often identified (“We have a 5:00 appointment available in GI”).

While the treatment is not exhaustive, Dr Crezee manages to cover most of the principal specialty areas in this book, including:

- Neurology (brain and central nervous system)
- Cardiology (heart and circulatory system)
- Pulmonology (lungs)
- Haematology (blood)
- Orthopaedics (bones)
- Muscles and motor systems
- Audiology, ophthalmology (sensory systems such as ear, eye and touch)
- Immunology (immune and lymphatic systems)
- Endocrinology (the multiple organs that create and regulate hormones)
- Gastroenterology (the digestive system)
- Urology/nephrology (the urinary tract)
- Reproductive systems (male and female)

Clear line illustrations add to the value of this third section. The final pages of the book include an index – making it easy to locate specific health information – and a list of useful websites for further study.

Especially useful

I foresee this book being extremely useful to at least three groups of readers:

- *New interpreters preparing to work in healthcare encounters.* This book will provide interpreters who have not worked extensively in healthcare a real ‘bird’s-eye view’ of the ocean into which they are diving. It will help them understand how to navigate the system, recognise the roles of the staff with whom they interact, predict some of the common questions they will be interpreting, and understand the basics of the health problems that patients and providers will be discussing. All of this will lead to more accurate interpretation, which, of course, is the goal of all interpreter training.
- *Experienced interpreters needing a quick introduction to a specific specialty area before going to an encounter.* Even experienced healthcare interpreters may discover that they have been called to interpret in a specialty area that is new to them. Alternately, an interpreter accustomed to working in primary care may be called suddenly to an inpatient encounter. In these cases, this book will provide a valuable introduction to the new specialty area, in a reasonable amount of time, with just the right level of detail.

- *Interpreter trainers looking for a text to amplify their treatment of healthcare.* There is a frustrating lack of useful texts for healthcare interpreter education. This book should become one of the default texts for any healthcare interpreter class to reiterate, complement, and expand on the in-class work on basic interpreting and health-specific topics. The lists of common diagnostic questions can become valuable material for practice scenarios, and teaching students to use books such as this one for continued learning should be part of all interpreting courses.

Caveats

No book can be all things to all readers. Dr Crezee has ambitiously targeted this book toward an international readership, recognising that, while biomedicine is very similar from country to country, healthcare systems and terminology differ from place to place. Despite efforts to include common terms used in different countries of the English-speaking world, readers will frequently come across missteps. There are some terms introduced as generic, such as *operating theatre* for example, that would not be heard in the U.S., where *operating room* would be the term of choice. Other terms that are indicated as being used in the US simply are not: a Primary Care Provider in the US is a PCP, not a PP, and a Registered Nurse Practitioner is an ARNP or NP, not an ANP. None of these make the text unintelligible but they may lead to slight confusions if the interpreter were to use a term that is simply not in use in the particular venue, such as *ward clerk* in the US. On the other hand, this may be a limitation only for American readers.

Secondly, this book does require a reader with at least moderate English literacy; it is not for recent English language learners. A quick application of the SMOG formula for calculating grade-level of a randomly-selected written passage¹ suggests that at least parts of this book are written at a grade-11 reading level, although this level of difficulty is partially reduced by following the terminology with explanations. Similarly, readers will need a moderate level of health literacy to benefit. For example, the definition of *antibodies* ('protein produced by the body's lymphocytes to identify and fight particular bacteria or viruses', p. 243) requires the reader to already know what a protein, a lymphocyte, a bacterium, and viruses are. Clearly, one would hope that students of healthcare interpreting come with at least these levels of literacy and health literacy, but an awareness of the reality of the availability of candidates for interpreter training in some language combinations prompts me to include this caveat.

Finally, I must note that, at US\$54 / EUR36, the price of this book falls at the high end of what most working healthcare interpreters in the United States will be able to afford. I can only hope that remuneration for trained and qualified interpreters is better in other countries, and that it will continue to rise in my own.

Recommendation

Whether you are a student of healthcare interpreting, a working healthcare interpreter, or an interpreter educator, I recommend this book to you. Like a good map of a coral reef in the hands of a scuba diver, it will help you know where you are going, what you can expect when you get there, and how to appropriately interpret what you see to the other divers you bring with you. Happy diving!

¹ The SMOG formula, developed by G. Harry McLaughlin in 1969, is one of many formulas developed to test the readability of a written passage. In selecting my random passage, my book fell open at page 194, so I used the passages from section 4, 5 and 6, ending at the bottom of page 196.