



Crossing the divide: What researchers and practitioners can learn from one another

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Abstract. In this paper, I will claim that if it is to be meaningful, the interface between research and practice must draw upon the intuitions that practitioners bring with them into the research setting, on the one hand, and upon the methods of rigorous scientific inquiry, on the other. The paper describes ways in which this interface has evolved in the area of Interpreting Studies, as reflected in the past ten issues (2004 – 2008) of the journal *Interpreting*. Discussion of this interface is not new, of course, but the inter-relationship between the academic investigation of interpreting and the practitioner's experiences merits being reviewed periodically, in light of new developments, both in Interpreting Studies and in the practice of interpreting. The paper includes an overview of this inter-relationship, based on a corpus comprising ten issues of the journal.

Keywords: interpreting; interpreting studies; interpreting research; interpreting pedagogy

Introduction

The present paper aims at extending the discussion of that elusive divide between the life that many of us lead as practitioners, on the one hand, and as researchers, on the other. I chose this dialectical theme – crossing the divide – because it has been on my mind ever since I started translating – and later interpreting – even before I knew there was such a thing as Translation Studies.

The paper will include the following subheadings:

- Practitioners' intuitions – the researcher's greatest resource;
- Researchers' investigations – what use will they be to the practitioner?
- Editorial musings – what do ten issues of *Interpreting* tell us about crossing the divide in Interpreting Studies today?
- Working conditions – and particularly remote interpreting – as a case in point
- Theses and dissertations as a vital source of new research
- Conclusion

1. Practitioners' intuitions – the researcher's greatest resource

For those of us who conduct research – who take a step back and try to observe, to analyse, to question and to study the things that practitioners do – it would be true to say that most of us are, or have ourselves been at some point, translators or interpreters, or both. To me personally, in fact, the gradual conceptual shift from being a practitioner who operates on the simplistic notion of translation as an exercise in lexical substitution, to the kaleidoscopic configuration that I see in it today has turned into a process of ongoing discovery.

Attempts to examine the interface between theory and practice in Translation Studies are not new, of course. An unusual book on this theme, which came out a few years ago, bears the intriguing title: *Can Theory Help Translators: A dialogue between the ivory tower and the wordface* (2004). In it, a Translation Studies scholar (Andrew Chesterman), and a translator and translation manager at the European Commission in Luxembourg (Emma

Wagner) engage in an ongoing dialogue in the form of an extended e-mail correspondence. While their focus is on translation in its written form, I believe that much of what they write is also relevant to Interpreting as a profession and to Interpreting Studies as an academic pursuit. Wagner gets the ball rolling with a provocative challenge: “There can be few professions with such a yawning gap between theory and practice” (p.1). She then notes that her views about the dubious usefulness of research are echoed in the remarks of many translators she works with, who are either puzzled or – worse – repelled by the notion of analysing and dissecting what they do. As a case in point, she cites a British colleague, Graham Cross (1998, p.27) who reviewed the *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies* and concluded:

It is a remarkable storehouse of interesting information. But [...] will it help one to become a better translator? Does it help to give the translation profession a feeling of self-esteem and worth? Hardly. From the point of view of my working life, it is interesting but irrelevant (p.1).

Chesterman’s response leaves no doubt about the rationale for what we do when we stop for a moment and focus on the broader questions:

Would you pose the same question of other kinds of theory? Should musicology help musicians or composers to become better musicians or composers? [...] From the point of view of a practicing translator [...] theorists are somehow seen to be ‘up there’, like teachers, in possession of knowledge to hand down, or at least with the duty of finding out such information; and we translators are ‘down here’... just tell us what to do, tell us how to do it better, please. [...] Most modern translation theorists find this view very odd. [...] We theorists should seek to be descriptive, to describe, explain and understand what translators do actually do, not stipulate what they ought to do. From this descriptive point of view, it is the translators that are ‘up there’, performing an incredibly complex activity and the theorists are ‘down here’, trying to understand how on earth the translators manage. These theorists see themselves as studying the translators, not instructing them (p. 2).

This is the view of a theoretician who, like most translation scholars, has also been a practitioner. And everything he says is of course true, *mutatis mutandis*, of interpreters too. Indeed, who better than a practitioner may provide the most insightful research questions and inspire a painstaking process of exploration? Thus, for example, coffee-break conversations with practicing interpreters often include observations about their own on-the-job experiences – observations that could serve as an invaluable resource to anyone interested in gaining a better understanding of the process, such as:

- When I work as a pivot in a relay-interpreting situation I feel much more stressed than in an ordinary interpreting situation and I think my performance is not as good. It should be at the same level, but it isn’t;
- The high-profile assignments I’ve done (on television, for example) have been much more stressful than working in a conference setting, even when the text itself was easy;
- I don’t know why, but I prefer to take notes (for consecutive interpreting) in my A-language, regardless of whether it is the source or the target;

- I always try to let my booth-mate go first. My interpreting performance during the first few minutes of a conference is usually pretty shaky, but it gets better after that;
- I have trouble interpreting long numbers unless I jot them down as soon as I hear them. I think I make fewer mistakes when I do that;
- Not being able to see the speaker doesn't really matter to me as long as I can see the slides;
- I work pretty well from my third language into my first. I also manage well from my first language into my second, but when it comes to interpreting from my C into B, I stumble much too often and I've decided not to work in that direction anymore;
- I have no problem coping with a strong local accent that I'm familiar with, but whenever there's a strong accent that I'm less familiar with, I find it disconcerting and my interpreting is less effective;
- Whenever there is a list of items, I've noticed that even if I do omit a few of them, I almost always manage to retain the first and the last ones;
- I do much better with speakers who don't read their text, but speak off the cuff;
- I think I work better into my first language, but maybe it's just an illusion;
- I get the impression that my listeners don't understand the discussion as well as the listeners of the original speaker because they hardly participate. I wonder why;
- I learned interpreting by doing it. I don't think you can be taught. That's just a way for the universities to keep going.

What puzzles me whenever I listen to these musings, each of which could be formulated as a research hypothesis, is that my colleagues rarely see the point of taking these thoughts further, of subjecting them to methodical exploration. "It's not something that can be researched," one of them told me. "Every interpreter is different so how can you tell?" Or: "It's not something you need to check, and how would you check it anyhow?" These are natural reactions, I suppose, and possibly also a reflection of the natural discomfort we all feel sometimes when we find ourselves being observed – or worse, evaluated. As Catherine Stenzl (1983) has aptly put it:

We are quite pleased when psychologists confirm that ours is a complex job which requires a number of highly developed skills, but we are perhaps less inclined to document the limits of our skills and to face the occasions when we did not properly understand the speaker or were unable to adequately render a message.

2. Researchers' investigations – what use will they be to the practitioner?

This frustration, caused by my colleagues' scepticism about the relevance of research into the very issues that interest them, is the driving force behind my decision to explore alternative strategies for crossing the divide. As Chesterman and Wagner demonstrate, and as any "practisearcher"¹ knows, the divide runs through other domains of Translation Studies as well. The

¹ The term is attributed to Daniel Gile, a practisearcher, par excellence.

following example takes as its point of departure the work of Olohan and Baker (2000), translation scholars at the University of Manchester, specialising in corpus-based translation studies. In one of the first large-scale empirical studies comparing translated and non-translated corpora, they found that translations display a significantly greater use of the word *that* before relative clauses, especially when preceded by a reporting verb such as *say* and *tell*. (For example: *She said that she would arrive* as opposed to *She said she would arrive*.) Without dwelling on their theoretical analysis, and the possible relationship of their findings to the arguably universal tendency of translators to add explicitation to translated texts, suffice it for us to describe its implications from the standpoint of the practicing translator (into English) – using our own experience as an example in this case. After reading the striking results of the analysis presented by Olohan and Baker, I introduced an admonition about the superfluous *that* into every lesson I taught in written translation. I also promised myself to bear it in mind in producing my own written translations. Soon enough, the opportunity presented itself, as I started working on the translation of a novel. “Remember,” the researcher in me admonished the practitioner in me to, “Don’t overdo the use of *that*.” The result, however, is telling:

Stage One: Repeatedly, as I translated, I found myself writing *that* to introduce relative clauses and then deleting it, remembering well the article I had read.

Stage Two: After finishing the translation, I conducted a search for the word *that* and found over thirty instances of its use as a relative pronoun in places where it was not needed. In what may only be described as a bout of *translationese*, I had used *that* repeatedly in places where I would not have used it, had I been writing in English to begin with. I then proceeded to delete almost all of these, except the few where the use of *that* seemed to be mandated by stylistic considerations.

Stage Three: The manuscript was sent off to the publisher in the U.S., and was assigned to an in-house editor. A few weeks later, I received the final proofs, with various corrections and erasures – sixteen of which involved the superfluous use of *that*!

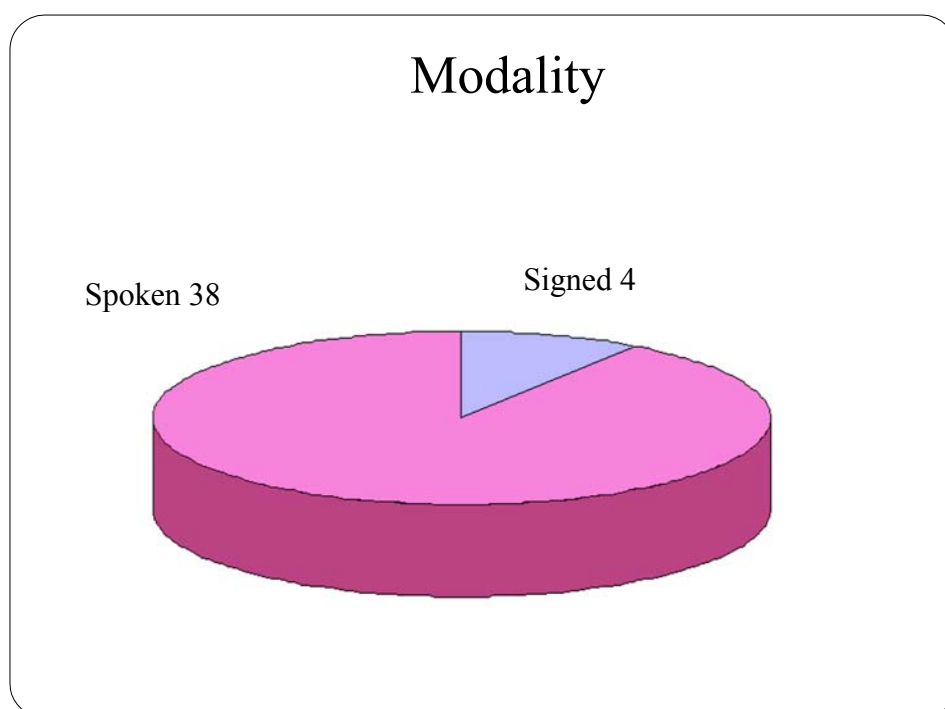
Clearly, as a translator-practitioner striving to cross the divide, my academic background as a researcher was helpful in raising my awareness of the issue. On the other hand, this experience also shows that the process is a never-ending one, and that even a highly aware practitioner needs some quality control.

3. Editorial musings – what do ten issues of *Interpreting* tell us about crossing the divide in Interpreting Studies today?

The example above centres on what a practitioner may learn from the findings of research and the efforts s/he must make in applying these to actual practice, whether in written translation or in interpreting. But what kind of research will continue to provide such findings and what kind of interface between researchers and practitioners will improve the chances of learning from them? Presumably, the kinds of research that are being published in the journals and publications that our discipline has been producing at an ever-faster pace. One of these is the journal *Interpreting – International journal of research and practice in interpreting*. Were it not for the many excellent submissions on highly topical themes, this journal – and others like it – would lose its vitality and indeed its *raison d’etre*. As co-editors, Franz Pöchhacker and I recently celebrated the appearance of our tenth co-edited issue, having begun in 2004 with issue 6(1) and marked the end of 2008 with issue 10(2) – two issues per year over a period of five years. The present paper, then, is

being written as part of a process of stepping back and attempting a kind of “editor’s eye view” of the research that has been submitted over these five years, bearing in mind that Interpreting Studies is a relatively new and ever-changing sub-discipline, and that its growing academisation has led to a bumper crop. The range of themes, paradigms, sub-disciplines and perspectives represented on its shelves would have baffled our predecessors of fifty – even fifteen – years ago, and the vogue words and jargon would have sent them running for their dictionaries.

Of course, articles on interpreting appear in regular Translation Studies journals as well, but a dedicated journal may be seen as representing a kind of critical mass. Its aim, as the blurb on the inside cover indicates, is to serve as “a medium for research and debate on all aspects of interpreting, in its various modes, modalities (spoken and signed) and settings (conferences, media, courtroom, healthcare and others) [and to] promote our understanding of the socio-cultural, cognitive and linguistic dimensions of interpreting as an activity and process.” In the ten issues under review for the purposes of this paper, we have published forty-four articles², many of which illustrate the ways in which theoreticians and practitioners are engaging in an ongoing symbiotic relationship, learning from one another, and thus crossing the divide. In what follows, I have attempted to provide a sense of where we are headed, based on where we have recently been.

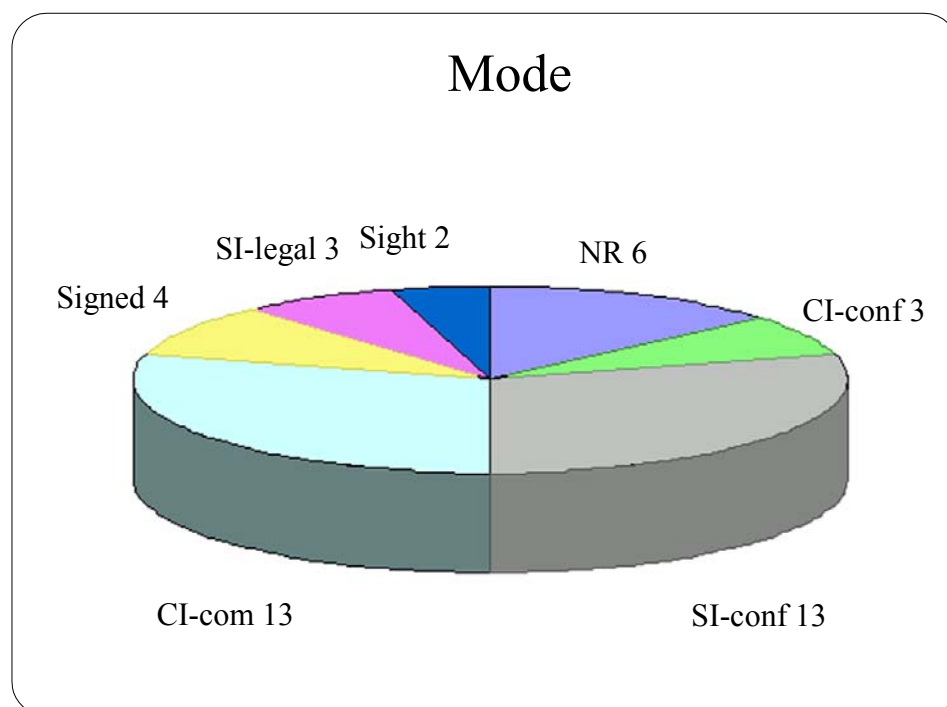


Modality

As part of the redistribution of the discipline, Interpreting Studies has gradually become an integral part of “mainstream” Translation Studies. (The discussion of the relation between the two disciplines or sub-disciplines is part of our history by now (Schäffner 2004). Meanwhile, Interpreting Studies itself has taken many interesting turns. Four of the forty-four papers

² In a few of the pie charts below, one or two of the articles were not readily classifiable, and the total number of articles is therefore lower.

discussed here have dealt with interpreting in signed languages, attesting to an evolving partnership between two sub-sub-disciplines that are so obviously inter-related, the spoken and the signed. Thus, for example, the interpreting process discussed in Jemina Napier's "Interpreting omissions: A new perspective" (2004), centring on conscious or unconscious use of omissions as a coping strategy, has implications for the spoken modality as well. The remaining three signed-language-related papers focus on pedagogical issues, and like so many "pedagogical" papers, they express the anxiety, uncertainty and frustration involved in screening applicants to interpreting training and providing truly effective instruction in the short time available.



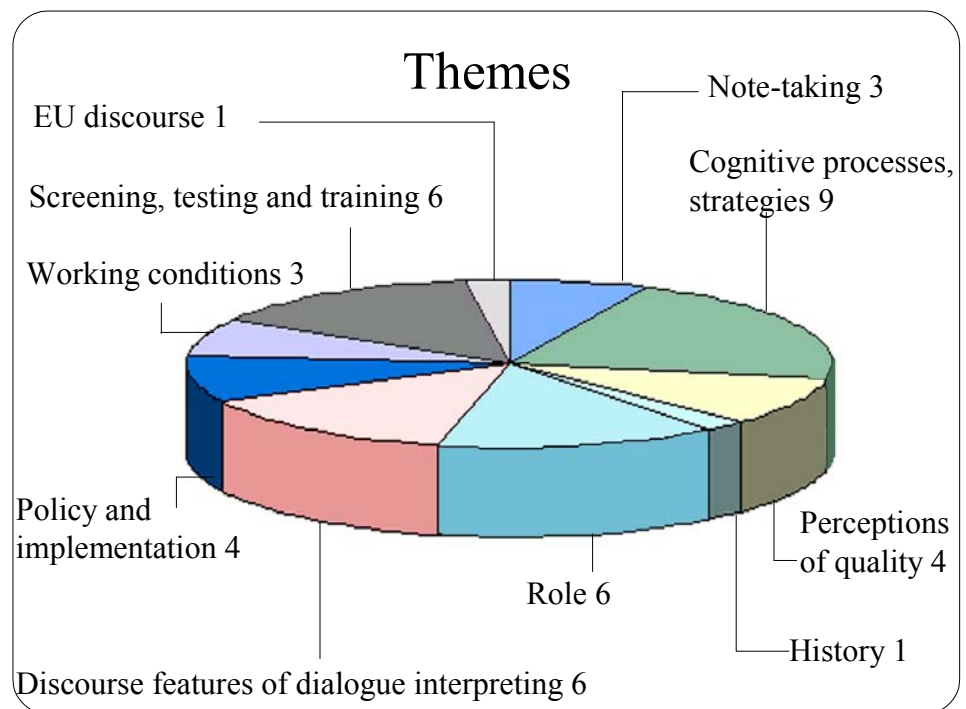
Mode

When it comes to defining the mode of interpreting, matters are a bit trickier. Disregarding the articles that are not relevant (NR), since they are not about any particular mode, and disregarding the four signed language articles mentioned above, we find two papers dealing with the "hybrid" mode of sight translation, sixteen focusing on consecutive and the same number on simultaneous. Whereas the focus in earlier investigations had been primarily on issues of note-taking and of directionality, thirteen of the sixteen papers on **consecutive** interpreting in these issues deal with community-based settings and only three relate to conference interpreting (and more specifically, to note-taking). Of the sixteen papers on **simultaneous** interpreting, on the other hand, thirteen have to do with conference interpreting (mostly centring on the cognitive processes involved) while only three deal with non-conference settings (asylum hearings and the courtroom).

Methodology

In his article "Observational studies and experimental studies in the investigation of conference interpreting," Daniel Gile (1998) makes a strong case for the observational approach – which is likelier to provide a reliable picture and less likely to be skewed by methodological flaws (a sample that is

too small, or non-random, for example). The forty-four articles that have appeared in the past ten issues of *Interpreting* reveal an impressive array of methodologies – a far cry from the almost exclusive reliance on the experimental paradigm in the earlier days. Only eleven (25%) were experimental, mostly aimed at analysing the cognitive efforts involved in simultaneous interpreting. The remaining thirty-three were not; they included discourse analytical studies (mostly based on authentic outputs, produced in natural settings); retrospections and interviews; archival reports (primarily based on historical documents, from which to infer about interpreting as it was practiced decades ago (in Japan) or even centuries ago (in China)); user surveys; focus groups – a costly and labour-intensive but highly productive form of qualitative research; and classroom-based action research.

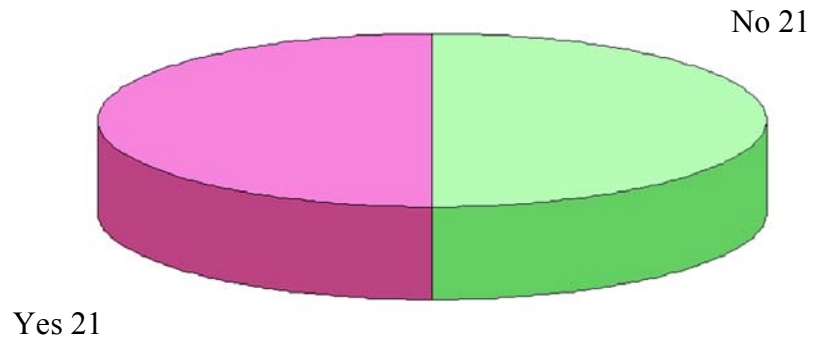


Themes

The forty-four articles reveal an exceptionally diverse panoply of themes. Again, the study of cognition – strategies for coping with the cognitive load and forms of note-taking – accounted for a large number of studies, but by no means the lion’s share. Others dealt with pedagogical methods (six papers), quality (four papers), working conditions (three papers) or history (one paper). And since a remarkably high proportion of the papers dealt with community and legal interpreting, there were – not surprisingly – six on role definition, six on discourse features of dialogue interpreting and four on policy in non-conference settings.

Pedagogical applications

Pedagogical Application

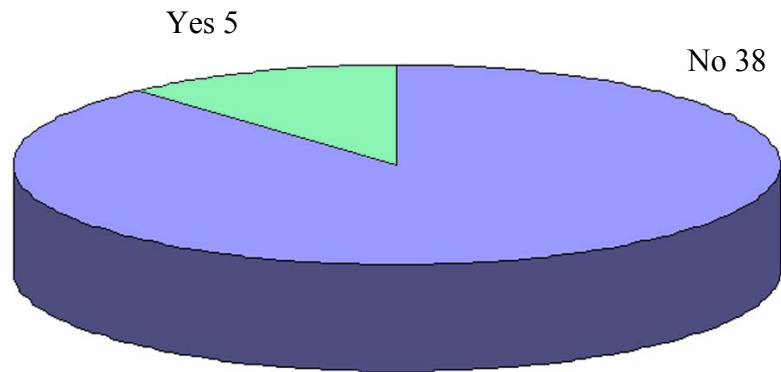


A full 50% of the papers in these issues either centred on pedagogical issues – how to screen, train, evaluate and test trainees – or ended with some kind of pedagogical suggestions, along the lines of: “These findings may be helpful to the classroom teacher in training future interpreters.” Clearly then, the divide is being crossed not only between practitioners and researchers but also between practisearchers and teachers, who seek ways of harnessing research to improve their methods of imparting the elusive skill of interpreting.

4. Working conditions – and particularly remote interpreting – as a case in point

Following this overview of the forty-four articles in ten issues of a journal dedicated to “research and practice” in interpreting, it may be helpful to zoom in on one particular topic to illustrate the interplay between practitioners’ intuitions, observers’ expectations and empirical findings. The effects of working conditions, and more specifically remote interpreting (RI), may serve as a case in point. Whenever an interpreter is working away from the meeting room either through a video-conferencing set-up or through a cabled arrangement, s/he is engaging in remote interpreting, which is essentially an effort to adapt the interpreting profession to the changing needs of its major clients, and “is often envisaged as a cost-effective way of breaking the language barrier in international and intercultural communication” (Niska 1999). The interpreting community has greeted its introduction with scepticism and apprehension. A clear-cut, cogent case against introducing it on a larger scale might have been more easily made if empirical evidence had produced counter-evidence; in other words, if experimental findings pointed to a marked and indisputable decline in quality of output or in interpreters’ health, or both, whenever the interpreter was positioned outside of the conference hall. The existing body of research, however, seems to provide a mixed review, and to suggest that it is not necessarily either harmful or otherwise unacceptable – **provided** that it is performed under the right set of technical, acoustical and psycho-social circumstances.

Remote



In many ways, the heated debate generated by remote interpreting is reminiscent of previous controversies surrounding working conditions, dating as far back as the shift from consecutive to simultaneous as the primary mode of interpreting (Gaiba 1998, p.34) and the dispute over into-B interpreting (Donovan 2004). The remote interpreting debate also brings to mind the longstanding insistence by interpreting professionals (with the noteworthy exception of signed-language interpreters) on the importance of maintaining a clear view of the speaker. There too, a contradiction emerged between intuitive assumptions and established norms, on the one hand, and empirical findings, on the other: intuition tells us that interpreters' performance will suffer if they are unable to see the speaker, and this intuition is firmly reflected in the discourse of AIIC:

[...] They did it, but at a heavy psychological and physiological price: stress, fatigue, intense concentration all took their toll much sooner than they would otherwise. It would therefore be quite unwarranted to conclude that remote interpretation can replace the present "live" variety, no matter what technical adjustments are made [...] remote interpreting seems essentially unequal to the task (Klebnikov 1979, p.174-5).

[...] Interpreters must take into account body language as well as speech. An interpreter must also be able to identify his "audience". When this is not the case, interpretation occurs in a sort of vacuum, with no interaction between the conference room and the interpreters who, just like actors, must be able to tell that the message is getting across. Without this feedback, interpretation runs the risk of becoming mechanical and the quality goes down automatically.

<http://www.aiic.net/ViewPage.cfm/article1107>

And yet, several studies – among them Balzani (1990), Anderson (1994), Tommola and Lindholm (1995) and Alonso Bacigalupe (1999) – have failed to produce evidence of this. In the community and healthcare context, remote interpreting has even been found to improve patient satisfaction (Gany et al. 2007). The hypothesis running through all of these studies was that if we compare performance in two conditions – with and without a clear view of

the speaker – using a matched design, we will find that the speaker-visible condition produces better results than the one in which the interpreter has no access to the speaker or the visual part of the message. In fact, however, when examined from this perspective, their findings have been "disappointing" and the speaker-visible vs. speaker-not-visible (or video-on vs. video-off) studies have failed to confirm the rationale underlying the practitioners' standards, as defined by AIIC. Furthermore, studies sponsored by the large, multi-lingual organisations (e.g. the European Parliament) have also pointed to a counterintuitive conclusion: remote interpreting, under the right conditions, may be far less of a concern than practitioners claim it is. One explanation may have to do with the sense of psychological wellbeing; i.e. it is not the objective reality of remoteness (i.e. of being removed from the working room), per se, that is the key factor, but rather, the interpreters' expectation of a qualitative decline and of a subjective discomfort that acts as a self-fulfilling prophecy. Thus, for example, an extensive study of the viability and implications of remote interpreting in the large international organisations (Mertens Hoffman 2005, p.283), notes that:

In the short term, no damage to the interpreters' health or their performance quality was found. **Nevertheless, remote interpreting affects the morale, motivation and burnout of the interpreters.** In our view, continued work in remote interpreting using the current technological set-up will increase the effect of the burnout process in the medium and long term, and could eventually damage the workers' health and performance quality.

Or as Moser-Mercer (2005) observes: "The lack of virtual presence has emerged as one of the major factors determining poorer performance in remote as opposed to live simultaneous interpreting. [...] Presence is vital to good performance in the booth" (pp.727, 733). In other words, human factors – including motivation and the effects of social isolation and the psychological role of presence (of "being there") in a mediated environment – are found to be the key issues.

Yet clearly, as every practitioner knows, remote interpreting is here to stay. If we follow the pronouncements in this regard, we discover the gradual realisation unfolding. Take, for example, two papers by Mouzourakis, a former particle physicist, who has been a staff interpreter at the European Parliament since 1983. In the first, dating from 1996, Mouzourakis admonished the international organisations:

[...] Interpretation under videoconferencing conditions will always remain more tiring and stressful, less likely to motivate interpreters and necessarily of lesser quality than simultaneous interpretation under normal meeting room conditions, according to current experience [...] there is a class of meetings that videoconferencing will never succeed in replacing, such as those of decision making and conflict resolution bodies, or of parliamentary assemblies (p.37).

The second paper, written ten years later, notes that: "[...] the interpreters' visual perception of the meeting room, as mediated by image displays, is the determining factor for the 'alienation' or absence of a feeling of presence in the meeting room universally experienced by interpreters under RI conditions" (implying that a suitable display may largely offset the effect of remoteness). Thus, practitioners and researchers alike seem to be accepting the realities of remote interpreting, and the clients (chief among them the large international organisations) seem to have accepted the obligation of seeking ways to facilitate this major change in interpreters' working life. To

take one example, the Ninth Circuit of the State of Florida, in an effort to keep up with the rising demand for interpreters, has created the remote centralised interpreting system (<http://www.ninthcircuit.org/programs-services/court-interpreter/Remote.shtml> accessed February 12, 2009).

Clearly, then, when it comes to the very topical and controversial topic of the interpreters' working conditions, in general, and the pros and cons of remote interpreting, in particular, academic investigation on its own will not do; the divide must be explored and crossed by ongoing dialogue between researchers, practitioners, trainers and institutions.

5. Theses and dissertations as a vital source of new research

Individual research may take many forms, but perhaps the most frequent in recent years has been the research conducted by post-graduate students or by non-tenured faculty members who seek a post-graduate degree in order to secure a better post. Interestingly, nearly half of the papers submitted and published were either the direct result or a by-product of a thesis or dissertation. It is these thesis- or dissertation-based papers that I found particularly relevant to the theme of crossing the divide, since almost all of the authors are also practitioners, usually at a fairly early stage in their professional careers. Here are some examples – one from each of the ten issues – in which a postgraduate student acted on her – most of them are *her* – intuition and pursued a line of research capable of leading to practical applications, whether in the conference hall, in a community-based setting or in the classroom.

Issue 6 (1), 2004 –

Marjorie Agrifoglio, in the process of writing her dissertation, published a paper on “Sight translation and interpreting: A comparative analysis of constraints and failures,” presenting sight translation, as a distinct mode, straddling the spoken and the written forms of discourse. In it, she looks into the management of cognitive resources by six professional interpreters. The constraints of sight translation turned out to be very challenging, despite – or even because of – the continuous presence of the source-language text. Agrifoglio strives to cross the divide between research (as exemplified by her own empirical investigation) and the practice of sight translation within the classroom and beyond.

Issue 6 (2), 2004 –

Shortly after completing her PhD on interpreting in asylum hearings, **Sonja Pöllabauer** submitted a paper on “Interpreting in asylum hearings: Issues of role, responsibility and power,” based on a discourse analytical study of authentic recordings. Her discussion of the role and responsibilities of the interpreters points to a tendency on their part to adapt their role to the expectations of the officers in charge – which may involve shortening or paraphrasing statements, adding explanations and (even) intervening in the interaction. Her findings could prove highly significant to practitioners, and to the other participants in the setting she describes, and ultimately to the asylum seekers whose prospects are clearly affected by these dynamics.

Issue 7 (1), 2005 –

Christelle Petite's doctoral dissertation also used authentic recordings, to examine simultaneous interpreters' repairs (self-corrections). In "Evidence of repair mechanisms in simultaneous interpreting: A conceptual approach and its practical application," she reviews the decision-making processes reflected in the outputs of eight professional interpreters. These are seen as evidence of their deployment of processing capacity, and as an indication of repair

strategies, in general, and of individual coping mechanisms, in particular. In an ideal world, interpreters working in the booth would want to cross the divide and learn more about the findings of such a study and to become more fully aware of typical patterns – those that are “harmless” and/or unavoidable, and those that might be reduced in the interest of providing a more fluent and more confident interpretation.

Issue 7 (2), 2005, a special issue devoted to healthcare interpreting –

One of the not-so-secret ambitions of Interpreting Studies scholars is to motivate researchers in other disciplines to collaborate on an interdisciplinary level, or to use interpreting as an object of research, applying their own paradigms and examining issues which are of interest to them. One example of this is **Hanneke Bot**, a clinical psychologist, whose PhD research involved an analysis of discourse patterns in six interpreter-mediated psychotherapy sessions. If studied by professionals who work in therapeutic settings, her findings – reported in a paper titled "Dialogue interpreting as a specific case of reported speech" – could reduce the uncertainty that is often reported with respect to the use of pronouns and ways in which the interpreter relates to her own (in)visibility in the interaction. It could also alleviate some of the tension that characterises the triadic interaction (client – interpreter – social worker or psychologist or physician or teacher etc.)

From **Issue 8 (1), 2006**, I have chosen not a research paper as such, but a report, by **Tony Foley** of the Law Faculty at the Australian National University on differences between the perceptions of lawyers and of clients. Having served as legal consultant to train interpreters in the legal environment, the writer also related to differences in professional perceptions and ways of improving the cooperation and collaboration between lawyers and interpreters. This report, "Lawyers and legal interpreters: Different clients, different culture," by its very nature and authorship, is a clear example of crossing the divide.

Issue 8 (2), 2006 –

Based on her doctoral dissertation, **Csilla Szabó** from Hungary contributed a paper on “Language choice in note-taking for consecutive interpreting,” with the interesting sub-heading: “A topic revisited.” In it, she did something that is all too rare in academic research, particularly in the humanities: she replicated and extended an existing study (by Helle Dam), which had appeared in *Interpreting 6* (1). If only we had more such work – with one scholar’s findings being tested and evaluated by another, using the same methodology – we would have a more convincing and consistent body of research to base our observations on. By controlling all of the variables except for the languages involved – Szabó used English and Hungarian whereas Dam had used Spanish and Danish – she was able to show that the specific language pair plays a role in shaping the note-taking process.

Issue 9 (1), 2007 –

Maria José López Gómez is a Spanish Sign Language interpreter, who carried out her doctoral research at the University of Granada. Her focus was on evaluating the role of different types of abilities in the performance of signed language interpreting. In a co-authored paper (with three lecturers at the University of Granada), titled “Predicting proficiency in signed language interpreting: a preliminary study,” the authors (somewhat surprisingly) point to the importance of perceptual-motor co-ordination as the most reliable factor, more so than cognitive and personality traits, with obvious

implications for those in charge of admission tests, screening procedures and the like.

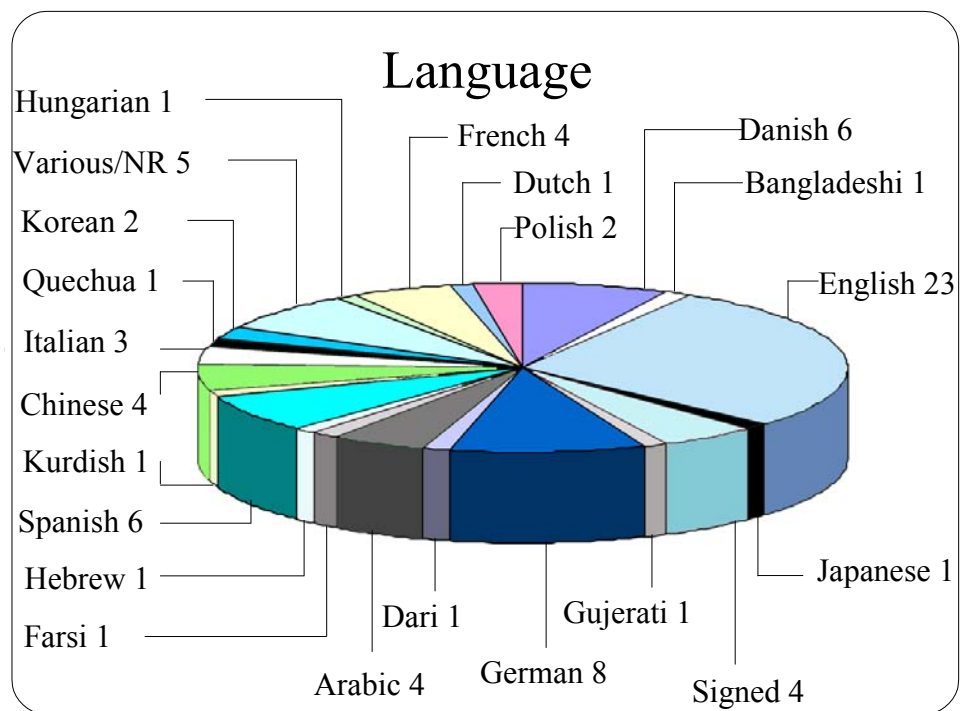
Issue 9 (2), 2007 –

The spectrum of language pairs explored and analysed in *Interpreting Studies* is a reflection of the ways in which the profession itself has grown. While research had once been confined almost exclusively to English, French and German, today's scholars are able to cast a far wider net. **Chia-chen Chang**, a lecturer at the National Taiwan University, examined "The impact of directionality on Chinese/English simultaneous interpreting." In a paper co-authored with her doctoral advisor, Diane L. Schallert, she triangulated experimental research with retrospective interviews, using ten professional interpreters, and discussed the participants' meta-cognitive awareness of the limits of their own language abilities. Given the ever-greater legitimisation of into-B interpreting, this discussion remains very topical – to employers, to curriculum planners, to trainers and to the practitioners themselves.

Issue 10 (1), 2008 was another special issue, this time devoted to court interpreting –

Shira Lipkin's paper, "Norms, ethics and roles among military court interpreters: The unique case of the Yehuda court," draws on her MA thesis. In a series of semi-structured interviews with the entire cadre of interpreters at a military court on the West Bank and with the officers in charge, Lipkin elicited their views about their role and about the expectations of the stakeholders in the highly charged proceedings against Palestinian suspects in an Israeli military court. As a young student, Lipkin was able to engage in open and instructive discussions of interpreting in an under-researched environment. Her recommendations, which focus on training and on the formulation of an ethical code, could prove valuable to bridging the divide in quintessentially sensitive settings.

Issue 10 (2), 2008, like each of the previous issues, includes at least one PhD-based paper: In "(Non-)Sense in note-taking for consecutive interpreting," **Michaela Albl-Mikasa** reports on her cognitive-linguistic model for consecutive interpreting. Although theoretically oriented, its implications for practitioners are enlightening.



As this list of ten sample papers demonstrates, the role of thesis-based and dissertation-based research in strengthening the ties between academe and the “real world” cannot be overstated. Each of them has added another dimension, another challenge, another set of insights to the growing body of research that is Interpreting Studies. This sampling is all the more striking when viewed in the context of the remarkable diversity of countries and languages represented as topics and objects of research in the ten issues that served as the corpus for this short overview.

6. Conclusion

Even as researchers we do draw on our own experience or on our colleagues’ insights as practitioners, whether past or present. That experience and those insights are arguably our most valuable resource. They are not enough in themselves, of course, but they are a precious backdrop for our reading and researching and querying. It has enabled us to follow an inductive trajectory from detailed (subjective) observation to more general insights. I have always felt that research was to be valued in its own right, regardless of its relevance to anything practical – and besides, sooner or later, everything turns out to be relevant and one thing leads to another. In any case, theory feeds into practice and practice feeds into theory, as our discipline and its sub-disciplines diverge and converge and enter into symbiotic relations with other disciplines as well. Although some of the innovations seem to be taken right out of Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), it is, in the end, an evolutionary process. Such was the gradual emergence of Interpreting Studies (though of course one could speak of landmarks and dramatic turns along the way) and such is the gradual shift towards community interpreting as a focus of attention within Interpreting Studies.

Coming from a part of the world where people's willingness and ability to understand one another is at an all-time low, and where breakdowns in communication between nations and cultures and religions seem to be hurtling out of control – I cannot help wishing that translators and interpreters might be more conspicuous and outspoken, and play a more active role. Then perhaps – by some miracle – they might even prove instrumental in bringing about a change. Maybe this is too much to hope for, but the better we understand the workings of translation and interpreting – both as skills and as

catalysts of human interaction – the better our chances of ensuring that they are truly effective. And in order to arrive at such an understanding, we must continue our efforts to cross the divide.

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