

## **Introduction**

Carol Sykes & Robin Warner  
University of Sheffield

The essays in the present collection began life as invited papers given at a symposium organised by the Department of Hispanic Studies at the University of Sheffield on the theme: Translation and Interpreting at the Hub of Disciplines.

The idea for the symposium began with the fact that several members of staff in the Department of Hispanic Studies at Sheffield University have diverse but overlapping interests in the translating/interpreting domain: as translators, critics and theorists of literary translation, as teachers of interpreting skills, and so forth. Our shared experience suggested to us that these activities tend to present themselves as relevant to a large number of disciplines across the range of arts and humanities subjects – sometimes as inviting definition within the terms of those other disciplines; sometimes as analogues and partial models for them; sometimes as exercises contributing to them; sometimes as querying their assumptions; sometimes as challenged by them in their turn. To this end we gathered the thinking of distinguished external colleagues from very diverse areas and concerns – linguistic, professional, theatrical, psychological and political – and working with languages beyond the Hispanic range.

A very welcome feature of the event, and a fruitful one in terms of material subsequently included in the papers, was the frank and lively but friendly discussion that took place after each presentation. In this respect, there were significant contributions not only from those who were there to give papers but from members of the audience, in particular, there were substantial and fascinating contributions from a group of sign language interpreters who were able to offer insightful comments based on their own experience and research. The topics covered ranged from the longstanding debate as to the desirable neutrality versus the unavoidable engagement of academic disciplines and the role of professional constraints and norms in the practice of translation and interpreting to the need to give due importance to emotion in models of human communication and the way silences and pauses in communication highlight audiences' awareness of context.

With the addition of some further thoughts often inspired by these discussions, the papers are substantially as they were originally presented at the symposium. We saw no reason to alter stylistic features appropriate to what were originally oral presentations.

Mona Baker raises in a particularly challenging fashion what was something of a keynote of the symposium: questioning the usefulness or appropriateness of the paradigms (mental models, discourses, metaphors, etc.) through which T/I theorists and practitioners conceptualise, organise and justify what they are engaged in. Baker tackles head on the issue of what should be the role of translators and interpreters in conflict situations, including those that have recently emerged or intensified in the Middle East in recent years, and identifies an undue influence of idealised narratives (as the term is used in Somers and Gibson 1994) on their overall conception of their professional practice. It is vital to replace romanticised role definitions with

reflexively aware models of professional behaviour, alert to the complex realities of actual situations.

Anne Corsellis insists on the centrality of T/I to a number of the challenges facing the public service professions in the context of the growing cultural diversity of modern societies and, in particular, of new European Union legislation designed to take account of such diversity. It is essential to continue to develop a new group of language professionals, public service interpreters, who subscribe to a professional code of conduct in line with what is practised in related areas of the public sector.

Richard Hudson recalls the main sense of 'interpret(ation)' as an activity characterising the reception phase of linguistic communication. Hearers interpret utterance forms in terms of their functions, a process that proceeds both from the bottom up at each stage of language comprehension (from phonological structures up to lexical and morpho-syntactical levels) and at the same time from the top down taking into account pragmatic issues (such as speakers' intentions, social status and all the other types of contextual information) that bear on the interaction. The prevalence of misinterpretation in monolingual communication, he concludes, makes the task of the inter-lingual interpreter even more formidable.

The emphasis of Nicholas Round's paper is on the multiplicity of competing metaphors through which those engaged in T/I have attempted—and are still attempting—both to explain and to arrive at a fuller understanding of the nature of the activity. A very diverse range of examples, from antiquity to the present day, is drawn on to show that it is not so much the inherent value of the metaphors themselves that should occupy theorists, but the need to develop a methodology for principled evaluation in a functional context of the various metaphorical conceptualisations that are applicable to T/I. It is on such negotiation of viable metaphors that future advances in translation theory are likely to be based.

Robin Setton poses the question of what advances have been made in interpreting theory that can contribute usefully to other linguistic disciplines. The feature of simultaneous interpreting that is particularly suggestive in this respect is the way in which simultaneous interpreters are able not only to fluently render discourse as it emerges but can often successfully produce versions of parts of it even before they are articulated by the original speaker. This ability suggests that comprehension of unfolding utterances is not only cumulative but also draws on a broad array of contextual sources far beyond the linguistically encoded input itself. Setton proposes that simultaneous interpreters are especially adept at exploiting the inferential dimension of communication as a way of circumventing the obstacles of the formal differences between source and target language.

The overall concern of the symposium with interdisciplinarity is reflected in Carol Sykes' examination of an area where two disciplines converge. Relevance Theory posits the existence of procedural (computational) items in natural language as distinct from those items whose function is representational. In *Interpreting Pedagogy*, in which the term 'links' is often employed to include such items, they have been identified as a particular source of difficulty for students (as opposed to matters of content). Sykes evaluates the extent to which procedural elements are problematic for

students by examining in detail the performances of a small group of student interpreters.

Concentrating on points of intersection between T/I studies and discourse pragmatics, Robin Warner notes that some central features of the latter's model of communication, especially notions of interaction as interlocking processes of production and reception, are characterized in terms and concepts that are intriguingly similar to basic translation activities. Associated issues, moreover such as mental representation, underdetermination, functional ambivalence and the non-equivalence of variables, are problems with which translators are all too familiar. From the T/I perspective, uncertainties as to how to define faithfulness or functional adequacy are similarly complicated by current tendencies to obscure text-function and authorial or translatorial agency.

c.sykes@sheffield.ac.uk

i.r.warner@sheffield.ac.uk