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## Book Review: Advances in Interpreting Research

George Major

Macquarie University, Sydney, [georgina.major@mq.edu.au](mailto:georgina.major@mq.edu.au)

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Open Forum: Book Review

# Book Review: Advances in Interpreting Research

**George Major<sup>1</sup>**

*Macquarie University, Sydney*

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<sup>1</sup> Correspondence to: [georgina.major@mq.edu.au](mailto:georgina.major@mq.edu.au)

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## Open Forum: Book Review

*Advances in Interpreting Research*, edited by Laurie Swabey and Brenda Nicodemus, is a welcome book in a field of research—interpreting studies—that is relatively new and arguably lacking in strongly developed methodologies and research-based pedagogies. The book addresses this issue with chapters that tackle an interesting mix of related topics, ranging from discussions of the theoretical underpinnings of interpreting studies, to reporting on methodology in research and initiatives in education, to very practical advice for new researchers in the field. At first glance through the contents and authorship for this book, the reader could easily assume that the book is heavily weighted toward signed language interpreting. Several chapters will appeal most clearly to those with an interest in signed language interpreting; however, the majority of chapters are targeted at, and relevant for, the wider field. The editors explain that they compiled the volume after observing a paradigm shift, in that practitioners and educators want to incorporate more evidence-based research into their practice, but they do not necessarily have the schema to do so. The intended audiences for the book are interpreters, interpreter educators, and aspiring researchers, and I agree that it would be a very relevant resource for all of these groups.

The volume begins with Franz Pöchhacker's chapter, which situates current interpreting studies within the wider research field. The chapter goes right back to the underlying philosophical approaches of the field, and the diverse array of theoretical conceptualizations of the topic, stemming from interpreting studies' origins in a variety of other disciplines (being written about from the "outside"), before it became a field in its own right. Pöchhacker also outlines the range of methodological approaches that have been used, and highlights the exciting possibilities of mixed- or multimethod research. The chapter may be theory heavy for those new to research, or for anyone who is not a frequent reader of academic texts, but it is worth investing the time to read this extremely insightful, balanced and fairly comprehensive summary of where we have come from as a research field.

Next, Debra L. Russell provides a clear guide to the research process with a focus on research questions. She provides practical tips for defining a topic based on the researcher's interests; setting relevant, interesting, and answerable research questions; strategically using the literature and feedback from expert researchers to refine them; and then going about collecting the data needed to answer the research questions. Russell makes the chapter especially relevant and easy to read by relating her advice to her own research experience (including her doctoral research). This chapter would be invaluable to any novice researcher in our field, and a must-read for any PhD candidate wondering how to narrow down a topic for study.

Barbara Moser-Mercer's chapter takes the reader back again to the big picture, discussing the field of interpreting studies using Shneider's (2009) descriptive framework of the different stages of a scientific discipline. She suggests that the field is largely in Stage 2, wherein researchers are still describing the range of phenomena that comprise the field of study. However, she sees the field heading toward Stage 3, which will entail, among other things, more specific knowledge, new paradigms, new methods, and a sharp increase in publications. Her chapter conveys a clear and important message that in order to ensure a prosperous and exciting future for the field of interpreting studies, the field must take great care at the current time to invest in the development of robust methodologies, and educators must teach students how to become good and methodologically sound researchers.

Melanie Metzger and Cynthia Roy describe their experiences in collecting and analyzing naturally occurring interpreting data involving a signed language. This is a valuable addition to the volume, given that the field of signed language interpreting research lags markedly behind spoken language interpreting research in this regard—not least because the use of video recording is a necessity, not an optional extra to audio recording. Focusing on a 3-year pilot study they conducted, the authors outline the problems they faced—in gaining ethics, approval collecting data, recruiting participants, setting up cameras in small spaces, and transcribing and analyzing complex interaction involving two modalities—and how they responded to them. They also suggest a number of practical recommendations for the proposed creation of a corpus of signed language–interaction data. This chapter is an absolute must-read for any researcher of spoken or signed language interpreting planning to collect naturally occurring data.

Minhua Liu's chapter is a review article focusing on methodologies in recent interpreting studies, based on research articles published in the journal *Interpreting* between 2004 and 2009. Her analysis is meticulous and gives a useful snapshot of both qualitative and quantitative interpreting research in recent years, and she also discusses the increasing use of mixed-method studies in the field. As well as highlighting potential new directions for research, Liu describes some methodological weaknesses of studies, or, more often, gaps in the information

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provided to the reader about the study. A clear and useful appendix is also included, in which all of the studies included in the analysis are laid out, with key information about methodology, data, and analysis.

Jemina Napier's chapter is an accessible guide to publishing research on interpreting. It is aimed at novice or aspiring researchers, and is an autobiographical account, at least in terms of research. That is, Napier refers to her own research and publishing journey throughout, and shares her own opinions about the merits of publishing. Given that she is a highly prolific publisher of interpreting research herself, this is advice to be taken seriously. Her main point is that research is crucial for advancing theory and practice, but has zero impact if it is not published. Napier gives practical tips for coming up with research ideas, explains how and why collaboration is useful, and gives advice on what and where to publish. This chapter complements Debra L. Russell's chapter extremely well.

Lorraine Leeson discusses the complexity of issues surrounding assessment within signed language interpreter education, a topic that has not been well represented in the literature to date. This chapter is clearly targeted at educators, that is, those involved in creating, administering, and judging the effectiveness of tests. It canvasses a wide range of topics, from the need for distinction between testing learner achievement and language proficiency and interpreting competency, to issues relating to test design and identifying minimal levels of competency needed by interpreters. Throughout the chapter, Leeson constantly poses questions that those involved in the assessment of interpreters should consider, and in this sense the chapter is useful to all interpreter educators, not only those testing signed language interpreting.

Jens Hessman, Eeva Salmi, Graham H. Turner, and Svenja Wurm's chapter is a call for signed language interpreting as a profession to become more engaged with research. To this end, they describe an initiative to develop students as researchers: the EUMASLI (the European Master in Sign Language Interpreting) program, which is run across three European countries and comprises a blend of face-to-face, video-conference, and distance learning. The program is built upon an ethos of research-based practice, and the authors suggest that through knowing not only what they do, but *why* they do it, interpreters can become reflective practitioners, which in turn will empower the profession as a whole. While this points made in this chapter are very relevant to the wider field, some of the details—for example, the discussion of International Sign as a useful teaching topic in the EUMASLI program—is probably much more meaningful for readers with backgrounds in signed language and signed language interpreting.

The book then shifts to focus on issues more specific to signed language interpreting. Applying the framework of narrative inquiry, Rico Peterson provides a personal account of his experience as a practitioner in order to argue the need for a distinction between interpreting and the work of “communication assistants” in video relay service in the U.S. He conveys a clear sense of the conflict that lies between his passion for the work on the one hand and the impact of privatization of this service, including a lowering of competency and certification standards, and inadequate working conditions. On the surface this chapter seems to appeal to a very specific audience, and its personal and subjective nature is another point of difference from many other chapters in this volume. However, it is an illuminating read even (or maybe especially) for those outside of the field, and may have relevance for the impact of privatization on other interpreting services.

Robert Adam and Christopher Stone explore the fascinating, “hidden,” history of signed language interpreting through a description of historical documents, in order to uncover the role of deaf people as language brokers (or “ghostwriters”), who interpreted and translated for other deaf people throughout history. Their research focuses mainly on documented instances of ghostwriting by deaf people in Europe, North America, and Australia, and they show that some things that may seem new to us (e.g., aspects of the modern day deaf interpreter's role), have in fact likely been going on for centuries. Their chapter thus provides a historical context for modern day signed language interpreting.

Finally, Laurie Swabey and Brenda Nicodemus highlight the scarcity of research on bimodal (signed/spoken) health care interpreting in the U.S., and outline the systemic factors that have given rise to this state of affairs, including a lack of scholarship in the field, a lack of incentive or opportunity for educators in the field to have advanced degrees, and a general lack of research-led practice. They argue that in order to change this situation, we need to change the way we view this type of work, and create a specialization of health care interpreting within the field. As well as highlighting these gaps, the authors provide both compelling and practical suggestions for how this could happen.

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In summary, this is an extremely useful book for educators, interpreter practitioners, and novice or aspiring researchers in the field. Regardless of its clear skew towards signed language interpreting research, the majority of the book is relevant to the field of interpreting studies as a whole. The collection of chapters gives a real sense of the background of the field, current gaps in research and research-based practice/education, and importantly, a sense of what conducting research on interpreting is actually like. I particularly appreciated the book's strong focus on methodology, which is generally a weakness of the field, and of signed language interpreting research in particular. As well as canvassing a diverse range of topics, the book is well edited, stimulating, and easy to read.

## Reference

Shneider, A. M. (2009). Four stages of a scientific discipline: Four types of scientists. *Trends in Biochemical Sciences* 34(5), 217–223.