Editorial Community Interpreting Research: A Critical Discussionof Training and Assessment

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Editorial
Community Interpreting Research: A Critical Discussion of Training and Assessment

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This is the second issue of Volume 4 of the *International Journal of Interpreter Education*—and the first time a second issue has been produced in the relatively short life and 4-year history of the journal. The move to two issues a year is in response to the increasing number of manuscripts being received, and the quality of the submissions, and we hope that you enjoy the opportunity to read a greater number of articles and commentaries on interpreter education.

The theme of this issue is community interpreting education research. In order to contextualize this issue, I would like to give an overview of community interpreting. We know that the act of mediating between languages and cultures is a complex activity. Historically, the academic sector has focused most of its research efforts on conference interpreting (Gile, 1994). Since the 1990s, however, practitioners, professional associations and scholars alike have recognized the value of community interpreting (Mikkelson, 1999; Pöchhacker, 1999) as being distinct from conference interpreting due to the bilateral nature of the work (Neubert, 1981). *Community interpreting* is typically defined as facilitating access to public services by mediating between service users and service providers who do not share the same language (Hale, 2007), primarily in social, legal, and health settings. Despite the fact that it is a rapidly growing field, there is variance in the nomenclature used, including public service interpreting (Corsellis, 2008; de Pedroy Ricoy, Perez, & Wilson, 2009), liaison interpreting (Erasmus, Mathibela, Hertog, & Antonissen, 1999; Gentile, Vasilikakos & Ozolins, 1996), and dialogue interpreting (Mason, 2001), but community interpreting is widely accepted as a generic term in the literature.

Opinions on the specific forms of community interpreting significantly vary among authors and countries, but the key component of community interpreting is the dialogic nature of the interaction that requires complex communication and role management (Valero-Garcés & Martin, 2008; Wadensjö, 1998). And we have lately witnessed a significant shift in many countries in the perception of community interpreters, from ad hoc,

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untrained, and unprofessional interpreters to skilled, qualified, and professional linguistic and cultural mediators of communication (Pöchhacker, 2008).

In contrast to spoken language interpreting, signed language interpreting emerged as a profession from within the community, rather than at conferences. Signed language interpreting practitioners were working with deaf people in medical, legal, and other dialogic settings (such as education) long before they started working at the conference level (Grbic & Pöllabauer, 2006); and signed language interpreting scholars (e.g., Metzger, 1999; Roy, 2000a; Turner, 2007) have taken the lead in debating the role of community interpreters by addressing the complexity of interpreter-mediated interaction, identifying the presence of an interpreter as a third party.[2]

The professionalization of community interpreting has thus led to greater discussions of the training, education, and assessment needs of community interpreting students as compared to conference interpreting students, for spoken languages and signed languages (see, e.g., Downing & Tillery, 1992; Roy, 2000b; Sawyer, 2004). Different countries have a range of systems for the education, training, and accreditation of community interpreters. Training ranges from ad hoc intensive short courses to established formal university programs; and accreditation is obtained through annual testing programs or by qualification on completion of a training program. Most countries start out with short courses in order to meet an immediate need and provide basic training. In some countries, (sometimes many) years of government lobbying, fundraising, and perseverance have led to the establishment of formal programs, along with infrastructure for professional regulation, monitoring, and standards.[3] Thus the availability of such training has led to a call for greater connections between research and pedagogy (Angelelli & Jacobsen, 2009), and we have seen a growth in the literature in this regard—notably in this journal.

The Research Section of this volume of *IJIE* includes four excellent articles from respected community interpreting researchers about studies of community interpreting training and assessment. Three of the articles sharing cutting-edge scholarship and findings on community interpreting were first presented at Critical Link 6: Interpreting in the Community at Aston University in Birmingham, England, in July 2010. The Critical Link conferences were initiated in 1995 by Critical Link International, which originated in Canada as the International Council for the Development of Community Interpreting (see http://criticallink.org/). After the initial conference in 1995, conferences have been held every three years, hosted by a university in collaboration and consultation with Critical Link International. Each conference features papers and discussions that focus on community interpreting across spoken and signed languages; typically, a collection of papers from each conference is published by John Benjamins in a book of proceedings.

Previous Critical Link volumes have featured papers on community interpreter education, training, and assessment, including, for example, discussions of orientation workshops for interpreters of all languages (Mikkelson & Mintz, 1997), distance education (Carr & Steyn, 2000), assessment tools (Fowler, 2007; Lee, 2009; Roberts, 2000), training for interpreters from refugee backgrounds (Straker & Watts, 2003), interpreter certification (Beltran Avery, 2003), internship programs (Johnston, 2007), and quality in health care interpreter training (Merlini & Favaron, 2009).

In advance of the forthcoming publication of the 2010 conference proceedings, this issue of *IJIE* features three papers from the training stream of Critical Link 6. First, Carmen Valero-Garcés and Denis Socarrás-Estrada from Spain discuss public service interpreter training assessment and evaluation; they provide an overview of tests they have used and an evaluation of the efficacy of their approach. Next, Kristina Gustafsson, Eva Norström, and Ingrid Fioretos provide details of a community interpreter training program in Sweden. Finally, Sedat Mulayim evaluates different modes used in community interpreter testing in Australia.

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[2] See Wadensjö's (2011) and Leeson's (2011) contributions in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies,* or Hale's (2011) and Napier's (2011) similar chapters in the *Oxford Handbook of Translation Studies,* for detailed overviews of the professionalization and status of community/public service interpreting and the relationship to signed language interpreting.

[3] See Napier (2009), which features an overview of interpreter education in a range of countries. Although the book focuses on signed language interpreter education, each chapter contextualizes the development of interpreter training within the broader translation and interpreting sector, and documents the current status of training, education, and accreditation in each country.

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The fourth contribution in the Research section is by signed language interpreting scholars who did not present at Critical Link 6, but their discussion complements the theme of this issue. Len Roberson, Debra Russell, and Risa Shaw from the United States and Canada provide a case for the training of signed language interpreters for legal specialization, which could also be considered and applied to spoken language interpreters, and is a large component of community interpreting practice.

Risa Shaw appears again in our Commentary section, as a coauthor with Mary Thumann. In their commentary, Shaw and Thumann discuss how they developed guidelines for interpreting students to submit academic papers in American Sign Language. These guidelines have been long awaited in the signed language sector; many educators have grappled with how to encourage their students to submit assignments in the signed language of their working language pair, in order to encourage the development of literacy in (what is often) students' second language. The guidelines provide an alternative to the APA referencing style often required by universities for academic papers in English, but they can be adapted for signed language interpreter educators in any country.

Finally, the Open Forum section includes a review by Debra Russell of the latest book in the interpreter education series from Gallaudet University Press, which focuses on another aspect of community interpreting: health care interpreting and health care interpreting education. Debra's insights provide food for thought for spoken and signed language health care interpreter educators alike.

The publication of *IJIE* Volume 4(2) coincides with the convention of the Conference of Interpreter Trainers in Charlotte, North Carolina, in October 2012. A selection of papers from that conference will be featured in *IJIE* Volume 5(2), due in November 2013.

Although we see evidence of increased critical discussion and examination of community interpreting practice, education, training, and assessment through the sharing of research studies, the reflective practice of interpreter educators goes a long way toward supporting that critical discussion. Research is invaluable, but reflection on effective pedagogy provides a foundation for ongoing debate.

Rather than end my editorial with a quote, for this issue I would like to sum up by outlining six principles for reflective interpreter educators to follow, as suggested by Ken Bain (2004) in his identification of what the best teachers in adult education do (based on longitudinal research and observation of effective teachers), regardless of discipline. Adherence to these principles will not only allow us to engage in best practice pedagogy and reflection, but also empower our interpreting students to become critical and reflective practitioners.

1. Know your subject extremely well and demonstrate an intuitive understanding of human learning: "Learning has little meaning unless it produces a sustained and substantial influence on the way people think, act and feel" (Bain, 2004, p.17).

2. Treat teaching as a serious intellectual endeavor that is intellectually demanding.

3. Expect more from students and favor learning objectives that embody the kind of thinking and acting expected for life.

4. Create a "natural critical learning environment," using various methods addressing intriguing problems and authentic tasks.

5. Trust that students want to learn and treat students with respect.

6. Systematically evaluate your teaching efforts and impact on student learning.

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