Interpreter-mediated drafting of written records in police interviews
A case study

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Text drafting is an essential component of many of the contexts in which interpreters are called in to ensure communication (Määttä 2015). As Komter (2006) shows, the drafting process itself can be considered a turn in the interaction. Interpreters involved in such contexts thus perform a communicative pas de quatre, crossing not only the language divide, but also the modal divide (oral vs. written). In this paper, we analyse how an interpreter in a Belgian police interview handles this complex task. It appears that she procedurally and declaratively recognises a written turn in the interaction and uses its authoritative voice to silence the witness by sight-translating the turn as it is being typed on the screen. In line with previous research on interpreters’ handling of dialogues (Hale 1997), the interpreter also shapes turns, including the written turn, to the needs of the addressees: upgrading the register properties of the interviewee’s talk and downgrading those of the written turn.

**Keywords:** dialogue interpreting, written turn, police interview

1. **Introduction**

Text drafting is an essential component of many of the contexts in which interpreters are called in to ensure communication (Määttä 2015). Police interviews in many continental European countries, asylum interviews, medical consultations, etc. typically result in written records drafted by an institutional representative. Actually, the drafting of a written record is often the main communicative goal of the oral proceedings, promoting the presence of written features in the oral exchanges. Research has shown that interviewees are mostly unfamiliar with the ideology of objectivity and neutrality carried by written records, unaware of the role of written discourse and written reporting of oral testimonies and unaware
of crucial aspects, such as terminology, syntax, etc., of written reporting. Therefore, users fail to do what is expected of them, running the risk of not being able to fully exercise their rights (Blommaert 2001; Maryns and Blommaert 2002; Pöllabauer 2004).

What is true of interviewees also applies to interpreters. As interviewees, trained interpreters often do not realise what is at stake in an interview cum drafting, as they are trained to interpret oral input. The oral translation of written material, called sight translation, is considered an ancillary skill in most interpreter training courses (Agrifoglio 2004; Pöchhacker 2004; Song 2010) and is usually not taught as a technique in its own right. However, many interpreters do report that they regularly sight-translate written records in their professional life (Nilsen and Monsrud 2015). Furthermore, the sight translation training interpreters receive focuses on the translation of coherent paragraph-long texts, whereas in some contexts, interpreters are often required to sight-translate short segments that are meant to function as turns in the interaction (Komter 2006). The special interaction status of written text being drafted, the drafting styles used by interviewers to record oral statements, the negotiation of the content of the written record are rarely covered in interpreter training. In short, there is a clear mismatch between the skills interpreters acquire during their training and the skills required by specific fields of the interpreting market (Nilsen and Monsrud 2015). The lack of awareness in interviewees and the lack of skills in interpreters are a combination that is bound to have a profound impact on the outcome of the interviewing and drafting process (Pöchhacker and Kolb 2009).

In this paper, we intend to analyse an interpreter-mediated police interview performed in a Belgian police station. Belgian criminal investigation cases provide among the most relevant contexts for the type of research conducted in this study, as written records are of paramount importance in Belgian legal proceedings and the use of interpreters is wide-spread in the police and judicial systems. The interactions of the participants with the drafting process will be investigated, while particular attention will be paid to the interpreter’s interactions. Resting on Komter’s (2006) proposal to analyse the drafting process during the interview as a turn in the interaction, this paper will investigate whether and to what extent the interpreter interactionally engages with the written turn (e.g., by switching to sight translation during the interview) and whether and to what extent she co-constructs the meaning that is being recorded in the written record (e.g., by collecting information or active gatekeeping). Interpreters are known to co-ordinate talk and co-construct meaning in interviews where the drafting process is absent or, at least, not foregrounded in the interaction, including in police interviews (Wadensjö 1998; Nakane 2014). In a paper on interpreting in Austrian asylum hearings, Pöchhacker and Kolb (2009) describe various ways in which interpreters
attend to the needs of clerks recording the hearings: they ensure that answers fit the question format, pause repeatedly while interpreting, repeat segments of their interpretation if so requested by the clerk, spell out names and verbalise the punctuation marks they deem necessary. After the hearing, they also back-translate the written record. Pöchhacker and Kolb (2009) adduce little evidence of interpreters’ interactional moves aimed at making room for a written turn in the conversation, but they do include an excerpt where an interpreter is seen interrupting the asylum applicant in the interest of the written record.

The purpose of this investigation is to fill this knowledge gap. In doing so, it contributes to various research fields: it deepens our knowledge in the field of interpreting studies in that it explores a lesser known context of interpreting, combining oral and written inputs. Our study is especially relevant for the field of interaction studies, as it has the potential to show how deeply the interpreter is involved with communication management allotting turns in the conversation, but also how determining her role is in the drafting process of the written record. Finally, our study is important for the stakeholders of the judicial system. Written records are crucial to the judicial process in Belgium (Smets and Ponsaers 2011) and deemed a trustworthy, though not literal, reflection of the witness’ oral statement. By documenting the degree to which the interpreting process interferes with the drafting process and influences its outcome, this study also seeks to raise awareness and spark reflection on the interplay between interviewing, recording statements and interpreting.

The paper will be structured as follows. Section 2 focuses on the importance of the written record in Belgian legal proceedings, its interactional role in the police interview and its features, with the aim to define precise research questions and associated hypotheses in Section 3. Section 4 presents the data used in the study that will be analysed in detail in Section 5. Section 6 groups the conclusions of the analysis, answering the research questions and assessing the hypotheses put forward in Section 3.

2. Written records in police interviews

In non-adversarial and court-centered judicial systems, such as the Belgian judiciary, the recording of statements made by suspects or witnesses is a crucial stage in the investigation of a criminal case, as the written record is used as evidence in court. Written records serve multiple purposes (Smets and Ponsaers 2011): (i) they represent statements about facts located in the past; (ii) they constitute a source of information about how these statements were elicited; (iii) they constitute the main source of factual information for the trial as police officers are rarely called
as witnesses by courts in non-adversarial systems. Written records have a dual nature: on the one hand, they look back at past events (i and ii); on the other, they look forward to their own judicial future (iii).

Drafting of the written record can be carried out by the police interviewer him/herself or a by a colleague. Experimental evidence collected in Belgium by Smets and Ponsaers (2011) and empirical evidence collected in the Netherlands by Komter (2006) and van Charlardorp (2011, 2014) clearly show that, when police interviewers are also the drafters of the written record, they tend to intertwine interviewing and drafting. A substantial part of the interview is actually devoted to negotiating the content of the written record, while the latter is being typed out. Komter (2006) also points to the interesting fact that the typing itself appears to function as a turn in the interaction: typing can occupy the floor, as participants wait for the typing to be finished before taking the turn; typing also ratifies previous talk as recordable. Komter’s analysis is interesting, as the presence of a written turn in the interaction is bound to have important consequences on a police interview with an interpreter.

As interpreters are required both by the ethical code and by their oath to interpret faithfully and completely what is being said (“de gezegden”) (Defrancq and Verliefde 2017), an important question is whether they consider the written record being drafted part of what is being said, namely, as a turn in the interaction. Komter does not envisage that particular case herself, but it is clear that interpreters face specific challenges if one of the turns in the interaction is a written turn: they will have to decide on the interpreting mode, performing either sight translation directly off the computer screen or consecutive interpreting after the presentation of the written turn by the interviewers. In addition, interpreting the written turn is a kind of back-translation of earlier interpreted turns by the interviewee.

Depending on how the drafting is carried out, the presence of the written turn is also expected to have an impact on the linguistic features of the interaction. In the Belgian judicial context, there seem to be no specific drafting rules (Pesquié 2002), but police interviewers do converge on a number of practices. Firstly, even though interviewees have the legal right (article 8 of the so-called Franchimont Law) to require their words be taken down literally, in practice no police interviewer seems to do so (Smets and Ponsaers 2011). Instead, interviewers mostly seek to present a coherent synthesis, in which events are narrated in chronological order (see also Jönsson and Linell 1991; van Charlardorp 2014). Most of the oral features of the interview are removed, starting with the question-answer format, creating the impression that interviewees volunteer their statements (Komter 2006; van Charlardorp 2014). Linguistic items typical of oral registers, such as hesitations and pragmatic markers, are usually filtered out (Gallez and Maryns 2014). Fea-
tures of written language, such as increased information density, long complex sentences and the use of technical terms, are promoted. This entextualisation process not only presents a fragmentary and institutionalised image of the interview, it also spills over into the oral exchanges, as the content of written records is quoted and negotiated during interviews. The resulting hybrid discourse is challenging both for interviewees, who are presented with a substantially altered version of their accounts, and for interpreters, as they need to switch between registers during sight translation or interpreting. Interestingly, in Smets and Ponsaers’ (2011) study, one police interviewer compares the process of drafting a written record to the activity of an interpreter whose translation is not a literal representation of the interviewee’s words either.

Secondly, drafters systematically present the written record from the interviewee’s point of view, using first-person to refer to the interviewee (Komter 2006; Smets and Ponsaers 2011; van Charldorp 2011, 2014). This shared practice can be problematic: the written record is usually negotiated with the interviewees, implying that interviewees are presented at several stages with preliminary versions of a text drafted from their own perspectives. In other words, interviewees are both the recipients and the deictic sources of written records that are read out aloud. This discrepancy is likely to be confusing, especially when interviewees’ wordings are significantly altered. This is all the more the case when interactions are mediated by interpreters, as the interviewees’ original wordings are first translated into the language of the written report and back-translated into the interviewees’ language. Gallez and Maryns (2014), for instance, report problems of this kind in the context of a criminal trial, although in that particular case, the defendant appeared more confused by the rapid shifting of temporal deixis than by the shifting of personal deixis.

This brief overview of the importance of the written record, its role in the interaction and its peculiarities allows us to predict that interpreters will face specific challenges handling the written turns during the interaction. In Section 3, these challenges will be formulated as research questions. Based on what is known from previous studies on interpreting in dialogue contexts without written records (or where the research focus was not on the written records), we shall also put forward hypotheses for each research question.

3. Research questions

The first research question this paper endeavours to answer concerns the status of the drafting process in an interpreter-mediated interview. If Komter’s (2006) analysis in terms of a written turn is correct, then it should be recognised by the
participants of the interaction. Recognition can be procedural, that is, participants grant the written turn the same rights as the spoken turns in terms of turn-taking (avoid overlap, cf. Komter 2006) and in the co-construction of meaning during the interaction. Recognition can also be declarative, for instance, when the participants overtly state their expectations with regard to the presence of the written turn in the interaction. As the written turn is a silent turn, its position and interests are more likely to be commented on by the other participants, especially the participant who is in charge of typing it out. Regarding in particular the interpreter's recognition of the written turn, evidence can be drawn from the relation between the written turn and the interpreter's turn: does the written turn serve as the direct input of the interpreter's intervention? In other words, does the interpreter sight-translate information that is being typed and appears on the computer screen of the interviewer? In the affirmative, the interpreter definitely recognises it as a full-fledged turn in the interaction.

Assuming the drafting is regarded as a turn by the interpreter, what is its position in the power configuration of the interview, especially with regard to the interpreter's intervention? Given the importance of the written records for the judicial procedure and most interpreters' acute awareness of the goals of the interaction they are involved in (Bolden 2000; Pöllabauer 2004), does the interpreter approach the written turn as a powerful voice in the interaction, attending to its interests? And what aspects are prioritised in this process: privileged turn allocation, active collection of information making the input for the written turn maximally informative (Pöchhacker and Kolb 2009), reinforcement of topical and grammatical coherence of testimonies, including the coherence of adjacency pairs as reported by Pöchhacker and Kolb (2009), substitution of ill-suited register features with more appropriate ones?

Finally, does the interpreter attend in any way to the interests of the interviewee as the recipient of the interpreted or sight-translated written turn? Previous analyses of court interpreting (Angermeyer 2009; Defrancq and Verliefde 2017) have shown that interpreters faced with situations in which the recipient of the interpretation is not the primary speaker's addressee, tend to prioritise the interpreting participation framework, promoting the recipient to an addressee role by means of second person reference. In written records the addressee is the judicial system, but when the written record is sight-translated for the interviewee, how does the addressee role of the interviewee interfere with this institutional requirement? It has also been shown (Hale 1997) that interpreters adapt register features to make interpretations better suited for recipients, especially non-initiated recipients: technical vocabulary is substituted with laymen's terms; colloquial words are used instead of formal ones (Gallez and Maryns 2014). Addressing members of the legal profession, the written record uses register features typical of professional
communication. However, the recipient of the interpreted written turns is not a member of the legal profession and thus has different needs in the negotiation of the content of the written record. We will also investigate if the interpreter in our case attends to these needs.

4. Data of the case at hand

This section provides an overview of the main characteristics of the transcription, the interview and the participants.

4.1 Preliminary note on the transcriptions

The data were transcribed according to the conventions laid down in Jefferson (2004). In order to account for the interpreting mode, we decided to derogate on one particular point from Jefferson’s conventions, namely, the numbering of the transcript lines. Interpreter’s lines are given a primed number whenever the interpreter performs simultaneous (whispered) interpreting. When the interpreter interprets in consecutive mode, the lines are numbered normally. The following codes were used to identify the roles of the different speakers: P = interviewee (prévenu ‘suspect’); I = interpreter; R = interviewer (rechercheur ‘criminal investigator’); A = legal counsel (avocat ‘solicitor’).

4.2 Interview data and interaction patterns

The police interview that is the object of this study takes place in a police station in West Flanders, Belgium. The interviewee is brought in after a fight that occurred in front of a restaurant near his residence. He is accused by his brother-in-law of having injured him with a knife. He is extremely frustrated, thinking the complaint is completely unjustified. On the one hand, he claims that his brother-in-law started the fight and that no knife was involved. On the other hand, the conflict had been going on for some time within the family and complaints filed against the in-laws had never been properly handled by the police in his view. During the interview, the interviewee is extremely agitated, shouting out loud at times, and shows little to no regard for the requirements of an interpreter-mediated interview. He often strays off course, talking about sports, linguistic skills, etc.

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1. The specific location of the police station is known to the authors, but cannot be revealed for confidentiality reasons.
As a result, the interview lasts for nearly four hours. In this paper we will focus on the first drafting phase of the interview.

The general structure of the interview is as follows:

1. Provision of information about rights and procedure (lines 1–133)
2. Free story-telling by the interviewee at the request of the interviewer (lines 134–353)

Each phase is clearly demarcated: the police interviewer takes the floor explaining what the purpose of the next phase will be. For example, in Extract (1), lines 354–355, the interviewee is informed through the interpreter that the drafting phase is about to start (a first interrupted attempt was made in line 351).

(1)

354 R ik ga nu:eu: typen wat hij verteld heeft
   'now I am going to type what he just told'
355 I maintenant il va: (. .) dactylographier ce que vous avez raconté;
   'now he’s going to type what you just told'

Drafting phases can be split up further in subphases. A recurrent scenario of a subphase is illustrated in Extract (2) and typically includes information delivery by the interviewee, interpretation by the interpreter and typing by the interviewer (lines 607–612), interruption of the interviewee's delivery by the interpreter (*ho ho ho attends attends attends* in line 625), sight translation of what the interviewer has just noted down (lines 626–630), occasionally followed by a ratification sequence (absent here):

(2)
venu me chercher (..hhhh) eu::h à cause du fait que j’aurais menacé
‘come to get me (..hhhh) erm because I was thought to have threatened’
quelqu’un avec un couteau après on m’a laissé <trois heures en bas> (.)
‘someone with a knife then they left me downstairs for three hours’
et après (.) on est venu me dire (.) que j’étais ici à cause de de
‘and then they came to tell me that I was here because of’
violence [contre
‘violence against’

The sight translation is initiated by the interpreter but is usually triggered by
the interpreter’s inability to render the interviewee’s turn or by the interviewer’s
inability to type it up. This problem-induced type of turn-taking will be analysed
in more detail in Section 5.

4.3 Primary speakers’ linguistic skills

The interviewer is a native speaker of Dutch, the interviewee’s mother tongue is
unknown, but he speaks French during the interview. However, it is clear that
French is a language he acquired at a later age, as appears from numerous gram-
matical errors and unidiomatic expressions.

Both primary speakers seem to passively master at least each other’s preferred
language of expression to some extent. Extract (3) shows that interpreting was not
needed for the interviewer to appropriately reply to the interviewee’s turn. The
police interviewer replies to the suspect’s comprehension check in line 712, sig-
nalling that he understands what the suspect has just said.

(3)

712 P  une idée parce que vous comprenez [monsieur (xxxx)]
‘an idea because you understand sir (xxxx)’
713 R  [ik begrijp dat ik begrijp [dat (xxxx)]
‘I do understand that I do understand that’

In (4), the interviewee completes a sentence started by his legal counsel in Dutch
in the same language, showing that he both understands and speaks Dutch to
some extent.

(4)

478 A  de vrouw [van eu::h
‘the wife of erm’
479 P  [de vrouw van xxxx
‘xxxx’s wife’

There are other instances of code-switching by the interviewee (653, 655, 676, 730),
especially in cases where he quotes police officers involved in previous episodes of
the case.
4.4 Interviewee’s awareness of procedures

The interviewee in the case at hand is acutely aware of the role the written record plays in the legal proceedings. Immediately after he has been read his rights, he explicitly requests that the interview be recorded. French “enregistrer” in Extract (5), line 93 can mean both ‘tape’ or ‘write down’, but as interviews are rarely taped in the Belgian judicial system, the latter is more plausible.

(5)

91 I (hhh) and donc eu:::h (. .) l’en=l’entretien qu’on a maintenant que :euh vou=vous ‘(hhh) and so erm (. .) the interview that we are having right now that you’
92 I allez être interrogé [concernant les ‘are going to be questioned [about the
93 P [oui (. ) et on enregistre tout ce qu’on dise parce que ça=ça ‘yes (. ) and everything we say is recorded because this this’
94 P va devenir une vraiment une enquête <parce que moi je veux pa:::s> ‘is really going to be an investigation <because I don’t want>

On another occasion deep into the interview, shown in Extract (6), he voices disappointment at the interviewer’s refusal to note down what he just said, saying that there is no point in going on with the interview in that case.

(6)

714 R ik begrijp dat maar hij heeft het al verteld dus ik ga het niet ‘I do understand but he has already told that so I am not going’
714’ I vous avez déjà raconté ‘you have already told’
715 R allemaal meer opschrijven ‘to write it all down again’
716 P alors si on ne peut pas écrire tout alors c’est même pas la peine ‘well if it is not possible to write it all down it’s no use’
717 P [qu’on est ici vous comprenez ‘to being here you understand’
717’ I [als je niet alles opschrijft dan heeft het geen zin ‘if you don’t write it all down then there is no point’

However, as will become clear in the next sections, this does not mean that the interviewee is familiar with the requirements of the drafting process itself.

Furthermore, the interviewee regularly brings up topics that fail to be ratified by the interviewer. The latter clearly prioritises a factual description of the events that led to the interviewee’s arrest, while for the interviewee, the arrest is only the (provisional) endpoint of a whole process. In the interviewee’s interventions, references are therefore pervasive to previous conflicts with the brother-in-law, previous complaints filed with the police on behalf of the interviewee and the inappropriate reactions of the police in that respect. The interviewee seeks to undermine the credibility of his brother-in-law calling him an alcoholic and claiming his wife underwent an illegal abortion. He also presents himself as a victim claiming that his irregular situation with regard to Belgian immigration law prevents him from filing complaints and that his limited knowledge of Dutch puts him at a disadvantage in contacts with the police force. Quite regularly he elabo-
rates beyond what the interviewer thinks is relevant for the written record, leading to an occasional stand-off with the interviewer, as illustrated in Extract (6) above.

4.5 The interpreter

Police and court interpreters in Belgium are officially called ‘sworn’ interpreters, as they have to take an oath in order to be allowed to interpret for the court. There is no straightforward or uniform procedure to become a sworn interpreter in Belgium: any individual who is able to prove knowledge of two or more languages and has no criminal record, can become a sworn interpreter. Belgium does not have any statutory framework to define the legal status of sworn interpreters, their terms of appointment or the procedure for swearing them in. Each of the country’s 27 judicial arrondissements observes its own procedures for administering the oath to translators and interpreters. Moreover, in blatant breach of EU legislation, Belgium does not maintain a national register of sworn interpreters. In each arrondissement, the court of first instance maintains its own list of translators and interpreters whose oath is recognised in that territory. As a result of these inconsistencies, the judicial interpreting landscape is extremely varied, ranging from professionals who have received specialised training in (conference) interpreting and have broad expertise to individuals who have not received training at all, neither in interpreting nor in languages, and who only interpret occasionally.

The interpreter handling the case is a woman in her thirties with some experience in police interpreting. She was asked after the police interview if she would be willing to answer some detailed questions about her educational background and experience, but declined to do so.

4.6 Position of the participants and the researcher

Figure 1 shows where the different participants of the interview and the researcher were seated during the interview.

The police interviewer (R) and the suspect (P) are facing each other across the table. The suspect’s counsel (A) sits to the right of the suspect and slightly further away from the table. The interpreter (I) sits to the left of the suspect. A computer screen sits across the table in both the interviewer and interpreter’s field of view. The researcher (C) sits at the short end of the table opposite the computer

2. This section contains information about sworn interpretation in Belgium at the time the data for this study were collected. At the time of publication of this study, Belgium has a provisional national register of sworn interpreters, but only acting sworn interpreters can request to be included until the system becomes fully operational.
Figure 1. Disposition of participants, researcher and location of main devices

screen. To her left is a camera recording the interaction. In addition, a small audio recorder is placed on the table in front of the interpreter. The decision to make a double recording was taken after it became clear during a previous attempt at recording another police interview with the camera alone that the audio recorded by the camera was insufficiently clear to analyse all the turns.

5. A written turn in the interpreter-mediated police interview?

In this section we will examine a series of interactional and linguistic features to verify whether the drafting of a written record during the interview is indeed viewed as a turn by the participants, including and above all the interpreter. We will first analyse the turn-taking in the interaction and ratification of input by the interpreter, as this may throw up crucial clues about the turn status of the drafting process. We will then study particular features of the interpreter’s renditions to verify whether tendencies that have been observed in contexts of ordinary dialogue interpreting also manifest themselves during this interview, in particular with regard to the written turn.

5.1 Turn-taking

As pointed out before, the interviewer marks the beginning of the drafting phase explicitly. He thus introduces the written record in the interaction. It is important to note that such an announcement is in fact unnecessary: the main interactional goal of the interview is the drafting of a written record. It is therefore clear to everyone that at some point the interviewer is going to start typing. This introductory line, however, implicates a notice to the interviewee that the turn allocation will drastically change and that, from that point on, consideration will have to be
given to the written record. The interviewee takes up the implication, voicing disagreement with it, as illustrated in (7):

(7)

354 R  ik ga nu:euh typen wat hij verteld heeft
‘now I am going to type what he just told’
355 I  maintenant il v::a (.) dactylographier ce que vous avez raconté;
‘now he’s going to type what you just told’
356 P  mais j’ai encore des choses à [raconter hein moi j’ai pas voulu
‘but I have other stuff to tell ok I didn’t want to’
357 I  [oui mais attendre attendre (.hhh)
‘yes but wait wait (.hhh)”

It seems that all involved in the interaction are acutely aware of the effect of the announcement made in line 354. As the drafting of the written record is going to function as a turn in the interaction (Komter 2006), it will inevitably reduce the amount of time left for the other participants and change the interactional dynamics, which was essentially monologic up to this point. There is general recognition among the participants and the interpreter of that change: the police interviewer introduces the written turn to close down the free-story telling phase; the interviewee protests as he realises that the presence of the written turn is going to break down his monopoly over the interaction; finally, the interpreter forces the interviewee into respecting the new participation framework and leave the floor to the written turn first. The interpreter’s intervention in line 357 is actually very interesting, as it presents compelling evidence that the interpreter views the written turn as a full-fledged turn whose recognition needs to be procedurally enforced through conversation management. The enforcement will be temporarily effective: the interviewee remains silent for some time while the interviewer types, reads out loud segments of the written record and lets the interpreter render the segments one after the other (illustrated in Section 5.5, Extract (22)).

The interviewer and the interpreter manage to maintain this routine for 10 segments. In the remainder of the first drafting phase, the interviewee will mostly overlap with the written turn, although he is regularly advised against doing so. On no fewer than 20 occasions, he is interrupted by one of the participants to again enforce recognition of the written turn. As illustrated by Extract (2) above, this is notably the case when the interviewee engages in long turns at a fast pace, whose content cannot possibly be recorded by the interviewer (or interpreted for that matter). The interruption is intended to make room for the written turn. Interruptions are frequently followed by prolonged pauses, as all participants wait for the written turn to be finished. The interpreter spontaneously intervenes in 16 of these cases; in three cases she is prompted by the interviewer. In the remaining case, it is the interviewee’s own legal counsel who enforces compliance with the written turn. It is thus fair to say that enforcing recognition of the written turn is
indeed an important aspect of the interaction in this particular interview and that it is mainly the interpreter who is involved with the enforcement.

The shared procedural concern with the drafting process is proof of the fact that most participants recognise the existence of written turns in the interaction. Recognition can also be declarative: participants hold clearly established views on how the written turn should tie in with the rest of the interaction and state these expectations explicitly, as illustrated in Extracts (8) and (9).

(8)
389 P et tous ses déclarations il m'a **accusé** avec des crimes [je pense]  
390 A ['*oui écoute d’abord tu as déjà tout dit*]  
391 A [*yes listen first you said everything before’*]  
391 A [*now he is writing everything you said (.hhh) and then you go on’*]

(9)
483 R *excuseer ik ga even=even onderbreken (.hhh) kunt u:: meneer misschien vragen*  
483 R *‘excuse me I am going to interrupt (.hhh) can you perhaps ask the gentleman’*  
484 R *dat hij iets zegt tegen u en dat hij wacht tot da je vertaald hebt want ik moet het*  
484 R *‘to say something to you and wait until you’ve translated it cos I need to’*  
485 R *ook nog kunnen typen he anders hoor ik dingen door elkaar*  
485 R *‘be able to type ok or else I hear all kinds of stuff mixed’*

Both the legal counsel in (8) and the interviewer in (9) describe the ideal turn-taking sequence for the interview in similar terms: turns need to be clearly delimited avoiding, in particular, overlap between the interviewee’s turn and the written turn (line 391: *maintenant il écrit tout ce que tu as dit et puis tu continues* ‘now he is writing everything you said (.hhh) and then you go on’). Interestingly, the interviewer states that overlap between the interviewee’s and the interpreter’s turns is harmful for the written turn, implying that overlap between the interpreter’s turn and the written turn is permitted, but that the interviewee’s turn and the written turn need to be strictly separated.

Extracts (8) and (9) clearly show that both the interviewer and the legal counsel grant the drafting process turn status in the interaction on an equal footing with the other turns. It also appears from the data that the interests of the written turn are particularly well attended to by the interpreter. When she notices that the interviewer cannot keep up with the interviewee, she interrupts the latter and starts sight-translating the written record as it is being drafted. The interpreter thus strategically shifts from one input source (the interviewee) to another (the written turn) in order to silence the interviewee and restore the desired turn-taking sequence. Extract (10) illustrates one typical case of self-initiated sight translation; Extract (11) shows a case in which the sight translation is prompted by a comment of the interviewer.
The interviewee is particularly agitated at this stage of the interview, raising his voice in 623, while accusing the police of believing his opponent’s statements rather than his. In 625, the interpreter interrupts the interviewee’s delivery with a silencing move and what is most likely to be a sigh of frustration (.hhh), followed by a recapitulation marker (donc ‘so’). She then turns to the screen and starts sight-translating the written turn. This is a typical sequence of events: in 10 out of 16 of the interpreter’s self-initiated interventions, the scenario is identical, though the markers that are used to instantiate the different stages may vary: ho, attends (‘wait’); hmmm, moment (‘moment’) or a combination thereof for the silencing move; ok and donc or a combination thereof as recapitulation markers.

It is important to note that there is no objective motivation for the sight-translation itself. The previous part that was sight-translated occurs in lines 555–559, which is minutes before this particular point in the interaction. The interpreter only translates the written turn that is being delivered, witness the short pauses in the delivery of the translation, where she waits for a segment to be finished. The sight translation is therefore unlikely to be motivated by the interviewee’s needs. On the other hand, silencing the witness does not require sight translation of the written turn either. The interpreter could restrict herself to reminding the interviewee that he has to wait before delivering the next piece of information. This however only occurs on three occasions in the data. On all other occasions (N=17), the interpreter both silences the witness and sight-translates the written turn that is being delivered. There seem to be only two possible explanations for this approach: it is possible that the interpreter tries to ‘stage’ the written turn again enforcing recognition from the interviewee after an episode of disregard. It could also be the case that she uses the written turn’s authoritative voice to justify the potentially face-threatening act of interrupting the interviewee. Obviously the latter option does not preclude the former (or vice versa).
As mentioned before, the silencing move by the interpreter is sometimes initiated by a comment made by the interviewer, as illustrated in Extract (11).

(11)

In line 768, the interviewee stops delivery spontaneously, while the interpreter goes on a couple of seconds to interpret his turn. The interpreter is then verbally prompted (nie te rap ‘not too fast’) by the interviewer to give consideration to the written turn. After acknowledging (ja ‘yes’) and a long pause (15 seconds) for the written turn, she abruptly switches to sight translation (772). This is a remarkable move, as sight translation is not requested by any of the parties involved at this stage. However, assuming that sight translation is a way to re-stage the written turn, the interpreter’s move seems to make sense, as the interests of the written turn were manifestly disregarded.

It is clear from the aforementioned evidence that the written turn functions as a turn in the interaction: one of the primary participants, the counsel of the other primary participant and the interpreter all expect the written turn to be acknowledged as part of a normative pattern of turn-taking. The interpreter actively manages the interaction with a view to protecting the interests of the written turn, re-focusing attention on it after a period of disregard and seeking support from it to justify potential face-threatening acts.

5.2 Interpreting input

Extracts (10) and (11) also show that the written turn provides direct input to the interpreting, which is also proof of its turn status: if written turns can directly serve as input turns for the interpreting/sight translation, they become functionally indistinguishable from the spoken turns. At the beginning of the drafting phase, the interpreter waits for the written turn to be verbalised by the interviewer. During that brief episode, the interpreting mode is consecutive and the interpreter
does not take the written turn directly as an input turn. However, she rapidly abandons this approach in favour of sight translation of the written turns directly from the screen. In other words, the written turn is the input turn of most of the information provided to the interviewee through the interpreter. Since we analyse the drafting of the record as a turn in the interaction, the mode of sight translation can be analysed as consecutive or simultaneous, depending on whether the interpreter waits until the typing has come to an end before interpreting or whether she starts interpreting while the record is being typed up. Extract (11) is an example of consecutive sight translation; (10) is an example of simultaneous sight translation, as appears from the frequent pauses in the interpreter's turn occurring at points where she waits for the next segment to appear on the screen.

Interestingly, when the interpreter is taking the written turn as an input turn, she almost automatically rejects all other input, as illustrated in (12):

(12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Transcript</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>392</td>
<td>I donc moi-même je n’ai pas déposé plainte (...) auprès de la police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>393</td>
<td>et donc c’est devenu pire (...) et xxxx (...) a commencé à exagérer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>394</td>
<td>P oui il a profité de la situation aussi hein’ si moi je veux à quelqu’un aveugler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>395</td>
<td>P j’essaie de lui donner des claques parce ça aveugle mais s’il voit bien euh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>396</td>
<td>P je sais même pas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>397</td>
<td>I xxxx est au courant du fait que je n’=que je n’ai pas de papiers (...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>398</td>
<td>I pour rester légalement ici en Belgique et il en profite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>399</td>
<td>P mais je peux rester légalement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400</td>
<td>I à cause de ça je n’ai pas le courage d’aller (...) à la police afin de porter plainte</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No single piece of information the interviewee provides in 394–396 and 399 is taken up by the interpreter and will therefore make it to the final version of the written record. From a legal point of view, this is problematic as the interviewee contributes an important corrective turn in 399. The information included in the written record, as rendered by the interpreter, is downright false and could be extremely harmful to the interviewee, but the correction fails to be noticed.

Only in two cases does the interpreter interrupt her delivery and agree to interpret a turn by the interviewee, as illustrated in Extract (13). However, in this case too, she forcefully restricts the interviewee’s input to a minimum. Incidentally, the short interviewee’s turn does not seem to make it to the written record, as appears from the sight translation that is performed afterwards in lines 417–418.
Occasionally the interviewee is reminded that he is not to interfere with the written turn that is being sight-translated, as illustrated in (14) (the start of the interpreter's turn is illustrated in (10)):

(14)

Interestingly, when the interpreter addresses the interviewee directly in 632 to retake the floor, she explicitly rejects the interviewee's attempt at correcting the written record (non 'no') and refers to the authority of the written turn to justify her refusal (compare with the acknowledgment in Extract (11)).

This over-prioritisation of the written turn can be motivated by the interpreter's awareness of the interaction's communicative goals: the ultimate aim of the interview is the drafting of a written record and interpreters are known to organise the interaction so as to achieve the interactional goals at minimal cost for all the participants and, in particular, for the powerful participant (Bolden 2000; Pöllabauer 2004). However, in this case, ignoring the interviewee could be motivated by less virtuous feelings. It is indeed striking that in nearly all cases the interpreter's decision to initiate interpreting of the written turn is triggered by the interviewer's incapacity to write them down or by her own inability to interpret the interviewee's turns. It is therefore plausible that in addition to prioritising the written turn, the interpreter's behavioural pattern could also betray an attempt to silence the interviewee by ignoring his turns.
5.3 Information gathering

There are quite a few cases where the interpreter engages in off-record communication with the interviewee. All but one of these cases are requests for clarification as she regularly fails to identify the people referred to by the interviewee. One interesting case is illustrated in Section 5.4, Extract (18), where the interpreter seeks clarification of an expression the interviewee does not want to clarify, prompting a long round of negotiation involving all the participants. In one case, illustrated in Extract (15), the request for clarification seems to lead to an instance of active information gathering in lines 524 and 526.

(15)

519 P et (.) ils ont vu ma femme ils ont dit (.)< c’est la faute de xxxx elle a
  ‘and (.) they saw my wife they said (.) it’s xxxx’s fault she started’
520 P commencé à frapper [votre mari>
  ‘to slap your husband’
520′ I [en zij hebben gezegd (.). het is de fout van xxxx;
  ‘and they said (.) it’s xxxx’s fault’
521 P oui xxxx c’est la [femme de xxxx
  ‘yes xxxx is xxxx’s wife’
522 I [oui (.hhh) et ils ont dit que c’était la faute de;
  ‘yes (.hhh) and they said that it was whose fault’
523 P de xxxx
  ‘xxxx’s fault’
524 I de xxxx;
  ‘xxxx’s fault’
525 P oui
  ‘yes’
526 I et il=ils ont dit que (.). xxxx a fait quoi;
  ‘and they they said that (.) did what’
527 P m’a donné trois gifles (.). et qu’elle a commencé (.). d’abord
  ‘slapped me three times in the face (.) and that she started it’

It should be noted that the interviewee had already provided that information a couple of minutes earlier (line 492). In other words, the interpreter does not elicit new elements for the written record, as reported in Bolden (2000).

5.4 Register alignment of interviewee's turns with the written turns

There is plenty of evidence that the interpreter shapes the interviewee’s wordings so as to facilitate their integration into the written record. Throughout the interview, lexical and syntactic structures are systematically more standardised in the interpretation than in the source turns. In Extract (16), for instance, the French source turn contains several non-standard structures, such as poser plainte sur (instead of porter plainte contre), en sms (instead of par sms) and repetitions (mais lui mais lui). The interpreter, however, offers a flawless and idiomatic translation with fewer repetitions:
Register features that could endanger interpersonal relations between the interviewee and the interviewer are modified, as in the following Extract (17), where the interpreter uses the neutral **police** (‘police’) to translate the slang item **flics** (‘cops’), which is probably also less suited for a written record of the interview.

(17)

607 P parce que quand ils m’ont emporté ici les flics toute à l’heure
‘because when they brought me in the cops earlier on’
608 I >als de politie mij daarjuist naar hier gebracht heeft<
‘when the police brought me in earlier on’

Occasionally, off-record communication between the interpreter and the interviewee is needed to replace unusual expressions with regular ones. In Extract (18), for instance, the interviewee uses the expression **faire tomber un enfant de sa ventre** (‘to drop a kid from her belly’, with wrong grammatical gender for **ventre**) to refer to an illegal abortion undergone by his brother-in-law’s wife, prompting a series of clarification requests by the interpreter, starting in line 786.

(18)
I: non (rire) attendez vous dites elle a fait tomber de sa ventre
'no (laughter) wait you say she dropped it from her belly'

P: oui
'yes'

I: mais elle n’a pas delivré simplement elle a eu des abortions;
'but she didn’t just give birth she had an abortion'
ou des accés des fausses
'or a del= a misca'

P: non elle est tombée enceinte et puis elle a fait tomber le bébé
'no she got pregnant and then she dropped the baby'

A: mais tomber
'but drop'

I: tomber elle a accouché du bébé ou elle=elle a eu un abortion
'drop did she give Birth or did she have an abortion'

P: le bébé il a cinq mois elle va chez elle a cinq ou six mois; qu’on ne peut
'the baby was five months old she goes home she is five or six months when you'
plus l’enlever mais elle l’a fait quand même
'are no longer allowed to have it taken away but she did it anyway'

I: ah une abortion illégale alors
'ah an illegal abortion you mean'

P: vous comprenez;
'you understand,'

A: oui abortion donc
'yes abortion that is'

I: une abortion illégale; c’est ça que vous voulez dire
'an illegal abortion that’s what you mean'

P: oui oui d’un bébé de sept mois dans sa ventre je sais pas
'yes yes of a seven months old baby in her belly I don’t know'

The off-record communication is especially relevant in this case because it shows the different rhetorical agendas the interpreter and the interviewee have. The latter clearly uses innuendo to smear his brother-in-law’s reputation. He is given five opportunities (800, 804, 807, 809, 810) to confirm that the act he is hinting at is abortion, but he seems reluctant to use the word or to even recognise that he suggested it. The interpreter, on the other hand, is clearly concerned with the interests of the written record and repeatedly insists on using the appropriate term, seeking the interviewee’s approval. The negotiation process covers a total of 29 turns, including two turns by the interviewee’s counsel, who is clearly adopting the interpreter’s agenda. A complicating factor in the negotiation is the fact that the interpreter misrepresents the concept in French: the French term for ‘abortion’ is avortement, not abortion. Admittedly, the use of a wrong term may delay closure of the negotiation process, but there is no sign whatsoever in this particular case that the interviewee does not understand what the interpreter and the legal counsel are asking him to confirm. The most plausible cause of the delay is therefore the difference between a rhetorical agenda focusing on the precise statement of facts and a competing rhetorical agenda aiming at attacking the reputation of the opponent in the case, without compromising oneself too much.

In conclusion, there is very strong evidence of a systematic upgrade of the interviewee’s statements to a status in which they become recordable in the written record. This is in line with previous research on interpreters’ strategies in adversarial contexts and oral proceedings (Hale 1997; Gallez and Maryns 2014) and with
research on how drafters of written records transform oral statements into written ones (Komter 2006; van Chaldorp 2014). What is new, however, is the observation that the interpreter at work in this particular case presents unrecordable oral statements made by the interviewee in a recordable format that can be used for the written records.

5.5 Properties of the written turn and their rendering by the interpreter

Upgrading the interviewee’s wordings is only one side of the interpreting coin. According to Hale (1997), upgrading in the institutional representative’s interest is mirrored by downgrading register features in the interviewee’s interest. In this section, we will check whether evidence can be found of such a downgrading process in the case at hand.

As the content and wording of the written turns are not directly accessible, we will have to deduce their properties from both the interviewer’s reading turns and the interpretation/sight translation carried out by the interpreter. As mentioned before, the set of reading turns is limited: in all, there are only ten segments. Nevertheless, a rough assessment seems possible. First of all, as Extract (19) shows, the interviewer predictably makes an attempt at a synthetic representation of the story-telling phase, summarising all the episodes of the conflict by means of a broad time frame that covers more or less two months (‘tweetal maanden’). He also uses general and abstract nouns, such as ‘discussies’ (discussions) and ‘bedreigingen’ (threats) and vague quantifiers, such as ‘tweetal’ (more or less two) and ‘meerdere’ (several) to refer to the series of events that took place during the previous two months. The syntactic makeup of his turn is clearly flawed as he mixes personal (we […] hebben ‘we have’) and impersonal structures (er […] zijn ‘there are’).

(19) (interpreter’s turns 359 and 361 left out for reading ease).

358 R <het is euh reeds een tweetal maanden>  
‘for more or less two months’
360 R <dat we meerdere discussies>  
‘we several discussions’
362 R en bedreigingen (.)  
‘and threats (.’)

Clearly, the written turns, as read out by the interviewer, do not reflect in any way the wordings used by the interviewee. Nevertheless, the interviewer drafts the written record in first person (mij ‘me’ in Extract (20)), thereby creating an impression of literalism.
These two properties – the summarising approach and the use of first person reference – classify the approach taken here as an “I-narrative” in Smets and Pons-saer’s (2011) typology.

Finally, the reading turn also betrays a tendency to use language pertaining to a much more formal register than that used by the interviewee. In Extract (19), ‘reeds’ (already) typically pertains to written registers (Delaere 2015). In Extract (21), the collocates ‘van zijn zijde’ (from his side) and ‘bedreigingen uitten’ (to utter threats), as well as the passive voice (‘worden geuit’ were uttered) are also properties of a formal and written style, contrasting starkly with the very informal register upheld by the interviewee.

With regard to the interpreter’s handling of the written turn, the analysis will first focus on the deictic reference framework. In an overwhelming majority of cases, the interpreter adopts the framework of the written turn, using first person reference. Extract (22) illustrates such a case from the beginning of the drafting phase, where interpreting is carried out on the basis of the interviewer’s reading turn.

As the written framework itself reflects the deictic framework of the interviewee, the interpreter thus most often presents the interviewee with a first person account of his own version of the facts. Evidently, these turns do not fit in with the participation framework of the interview. On four occasions, however, the interpreter does align the written turn with the participation framework of the interview, using second person reference. Extracts (23) and (24) illustrate the first and the last of these cases:
In Extract (23), the second person reference occurs in an addition to the interviewer’s reading turn. The interpreter explicates the target of the threats who remains unspecified in the reading turn. It is therefore quite possible that the absence of source trigger explains the switch to the more general participation framework in (23). In the second Extract (24), the exact phrasing of the underlying written turn is unknown, but we can assume that it does not use second person reference. This instance of alignment with the interview framework could be motivated by the interpreter’s desire to check whether the account she is interpreting is correct. The rising intonation in line 831 seems to support such an analysis.

Extract (23) also provides evidence of register shifts in the interpretation. The reading turn in 370 contains a passive and an instance of the verb *uiten* (‘utter’), which are both evidence of the fairly formal register used in the written record. The interpreter uses an existential expression instead (*il y a* = ‘there is/are’), replacing both the verb and the passive construction with an expression which is substantially more frequent in spoken than in written French (Blanche-Benveniste 1990). On the other hand, she also uses items typical of a written register in French, such as *afin de* (‘with an aim to’) in line 830. An interesting test case is offered to the interpreter in Extract (25), which is only separated by a couple of turns from Extract (23) in the unfolding interview. The case concerns colloquial and formal kinship denominations, whose rendering is also analysed in Gallez and Maryns (2014).
In line 378 the interviewee refers to the mother of his opponent using a colloquial lexeme: *maman* (‘mum’) in a turn that is meant as an addition to the written turn that was read out aloud by the interviewer the floor (379). The information is nevertheless directly picked up by the interviewer, who replaces the colloquial French lexeme by a formal Dutch one (*moeder* ‘mother’) in the written turn he is reading out aloud (380). Of the two register options the interpreter now has to interpret the written turn, she chooses the one that best reflects the formal tone of the written turn: *mère* (‘mother’). A couple of minutes later, however, she uses the colloquial variant several times while rendering the written record.

Extracts (23) and (25) are representative of the interpreter’s overall approach: she combines formal and colloquial features producing a hybrid discourse that seems to be a compromise between keeping in line with the properties of the written turn and shaping the written turn to the needs of the interviewee. This again means that the interpreter applies a strategy that is widespread in conventional interpreting: downgrade the register of institutional, powerful participants.

6. Conclusions

Due caution is required when drawing conclusions from a case study involving one single interpreter. The interpreting profession, especially in Belgium, is extremely varied and it would be a mistake to generalise the findings of this study without analysing a larger group of interpreters interacting with written turns.

Our case study set out to verify whether interpreters working in dialogue contexts where one of the main communicative goals is the drafting of a written record, attribute turn status to the drafting process and, if so, whether they interact with the written turns in ways that are analogous to the ways in which they interact with oral turns. The data collected from one interpreter-mediated police interview conducted in Belgium suggest that this is the case.

First of all, it appeared that, except for the interviewee, all participants, including and above all the interpreter, recognise the existence of a written turn, and try
to enforce recognition of the written turn by the interviewee. They do so procedurally by attending to the interactional needs of the written turn, interrupting in particular the interviewee's long and fast turns. They also state their expectations explicitly. It is mainly the interpreter who is in charge of enforcement. But it was observed that she actually uses the powerful status of the written turn in the interaction to support her interaction management, as interruptions of interviewee's turns are frequently followed by sight translation of the written turn.

The sight translation itself confirms the turn status of the written turn, as interpreters can only take turns as an input to their turns in the interaction. Moreover, the interpreter studied here seems to prioritise the written turn as she does not allow any input from other sources, while sight-translating. Vital information completing or modifying the content of the written record therefore fails to be included.

Contrary to a tendency observed in part of the literature, the interpreter does not actively collect information beyond what can reasonably be understood as requests for clarification. However, she does demonstrate a well-documented tendency to shape the wordings of both the interviewee's turns and the written turns to the needs and expectations of the other party. Register features of the interviewee's turns are upgraded to make them suitable to be recorded; register features of the written turns are downgraded to facilitate comprehension.

In conclusion, from the interpreter's point of view, the drafting of the written record during this interpreter-mediated police interview is a turn in its own right, but its interpretation is only deemed necessary if it suits the interpreter's or the drafter's interests.

References


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