

Shaping Our Academic Future

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Abstract

Many countries around the world struggle to provide Deaf people with qualified interpreters. Those who are institutionalizing a solution for this often do so through Interpreter Education Programs (IEPs) and typically situate their philosophy within a skill-based training – interpreting. We suggest this presents a myopic view of interpreting; a view that assumes language and interaction occur within a vacuum. Therefore, we believe a more useful paradigm under which to teach interpreting is a theoretical-based education – Interpreting Studies (IS). In order to do this, educators and students must be able to define Interpreting Studies and recognize the contribution of various disciplines that make up this field. Embedding these disciplines within IS requires grounding in each discipline’s theoretical principles which is significant as the education of interpreters takes hold in academia.

Introduction

Interpreting occurs within a particular socio-historical moment. It is influenced by interlocutors’ various identities. The language we use and how it is used is tied to our perceptions of self and others and is determined by the social relations in which we are embedded before, after, and during the interpretation. Therefore, a holistic view and examination of interpreting is necessary. This requires an understanding of the fields that, when used together, provide this type of insight.

Through our readings of the literature, we have found that the following disciplines have contributed to the development of an Interpreting Studies discipline: history, translation, linguistics, sociology, social psychology, and cognitive psychology (see Roy, Brunson, & Stone 2018). In this paper, we briefly describe the ways in which the major ideas and scholars of these disciplines have contributed to the knowledge base of IS. Our discussion here is not limited to one country or even one time period. To understand the shape of the future of interpreting, the field, its practitioners, and scholars who study it, the body of knowledge explored must be transdisciplinary, translocal, and translingual.

What is a Discipline

Most readers are probably familiar with the idea of disciplines, for example, psychology, English, mathematics, and others. However, it has been our experience that being familiar with the idea of a discipline and understanding the design of a discipline are different.

Every discipline strives to develop scientific theories about the ways in which either the world works or the ways in which we can understand human beings and their actions. Theories provide general principles for how something works or an explanation of the relationship between two or more concepts (Merton, 1967; Schneider, 2006). As Chafetz (1988) says: “The central task of any science and its theories is to aid in our understanding or explanation of some class of empirical phenomena.” (p. 5).

Empirical phenomena are facts or events that are observed, or that can be verified through approaches that include experiments, or observations, or interviews, or recordings, etc. Gathering facts, observing and recording events, interviewing people, counting occurrences, and detecting patterns are all different approaches to collecting data for research. Analysis then either confirms a theory about the way the world works or allows scientists to develop a new theory. We use theory as a way to explain how persons, places, or events, we experience are connected and related to one another. Within Interpreting Studies, we use theory to explain the process of working between two distinct languages.

Testing a theory requires designing a study. A study collects specific data (language examples, interpreting examples, survey responses, responses to experiments, etc.) and these can either be used to test a hypothesis, to explore the categories and themes that emerge from the data, or to describe specific phenomena within the data. Our own research work has put forth different, although not contradictory, theories about interpreting. For example, Cynthia Roy (2000) posits that interpreting is a discourse process; Jeremy Brunson’s (2011) position is that access is a matrix of various apparatuses that organize video relay service interpreters’ labor; or Christopher Stone’s (2009) position holds that Deaf translators adhere to norms that create an effective interpretation/translation. These theories were generated through the disciplines of linguistics, sociology, and Deaf studies, respectively. The challenge now is to incorporate them into a unifying theory that explains phenomena of interest to scholars in IS.

What is Interpreting Studies (IS)

To our minds, IS is the encompassing term for studies of interpreting between any language pair, and sign language interpreting is one area of study within IS. Whether a scholar is working in the field of literature, geography, or mathematics, if they are

examining interpreting, they are doing IS. We label IS for what it is, transdisciplinary. That is, IS examines interpreting at the nexus of multiple disciplines. This exploration then benefits from multiple disciplinary perspectives simultaneously rather than examining interpreting solely through sociology, linguistics, or cognitive psychology, for example. This approach can potentially move us closer to more holistic analyses of interpreting which would become both the form and the theory of the discipline of IS and Sign Language Interpreting Studies (SLIS).

As a field, IS strives to bring together different ideas of what interpreting is—an historical process, a translation process, a linguistic process, a sociological process, a social/psychological process and a cognitive process, among others. A unified theory of IS would describe how interpreting happens as an event created by relationships among people. Constructing a theory is and will be difficult, as not only does it have to account for at least three primary people (or more) and their interaction, but it also must account for layers of social and psychological forces and norms. There are so many concepts at play that it is like putting together a puzzle the size of a shopping centre!

Conducting research on the interpreting process seeks to explain how all the parts move and come together. Determining how we conduct research is where other disciplines have assisted. IS has borrowed methodological practices of other disciplines to investigate interpreting. For example, the cognitive process has been examined in experimental ways by psychologists (MacNamara et al., 2011), the discourse process has been examined through recordings of natural language by linguists (Marks 2018), social forces have been examined through institutional texts (Temple 2005), and norms and identity have been examined through interviews (McKee & Awheto 2010). There are many different paths to understanding the process and the future is to combine these theories and methods to present a more holistic picture. This is what we mean by transdisciplinary.

Adhering to an IS paradigm moves our profession away from simplistic discussions of interpreting towards substantive questions that encourage research and apply theoretical analyses. For example, in the late 1980s, we conceptualized the work of sign language interpreters as metaphors of practice (although they are erroneously referred to as a models). These metaphors (i.e., helper, conduit, communication facilitator, and bi-

bi) provided a label for one part of the work of interpreting. They focused solely on our interaction with the consumers. Within IS we recognize that interpreting can and should be examined as a social phenomenon, an event with people and practitioners all embedded in a particular history and influenced by the societies they all inhabit. IS illustrates that people involved in interpreted events are experiencing the moment not only physically but socially, linguistically, and psychologically. Understanding this larger picture informs the work of translators and interpreters.

Six Disciplines

What follows are brief glimpses of the six disciplines we consider the academic foundations of IS.

Through the Lens of History

History as a discipline brings together primary and secondary sources (i.e., interviews, diaries, newspapers, documents) to document and explain events that have happened, within the context that they happen. In doing so, the historian can provide plausible explanations for events in the present. Using a historical lens enables us to better understand the communities, and language practices that have occurred for different peoples located in different times, and how these resemble and differ from the current day.

Some scholars examine history and try to understand the multiple convergences of factors that bring about events. Looking at historical events is not merely learning about events of the past, but it is learning about who we are in the present by examining events of the past. Some scholars who examine historical events aim to unpack grand narratives, which often only offer a single viewpoint, in order to understand events within broader and wider discourses (Foucault, 1961). Foucault, for example, was far more interested in, and receptive to work which, instead of trying to understand the 'one and only' truth of things, tried to 'historicise' the different kinds of truth, knowledge, rationality and reason that had developed in cultures (Danaher, Schirato, & Webb, 2002, p. 6). Foucault's (1970) work in genealogy reminds us to be mindful of what information may be difficult to find, and how this might shed light on different aspects of "received wisdom", such as the work of Deaf interpreters, or individuals, groups and communities that are

discriminated against, be they women, people of ethnicity, minority or low status language users.

Historical accounts of interpreting triangulate the historical evidence we have of interpreters working from different periods around the world and explore some of the earliest references we have of spoken and sign language interpreters. Leahy (2015), for example, provides an accounting of how interpreting occurred prior to the systemization of the field. In her analysis, she demonstrates that the narrative that many have learned – the first legal interpreters in the USA were from the schools for the deaf – may have been incorrect. This is just one example of how examining historical records and documents inform our understanding of the past, our sense of the present, and our direction to the future.

Through the Lens of Translation

Translation Studies (TS), a term coined by James Holmes (1972), is the scientific study of the many aspects of translation including the activity of translating. Holmes suggested that the concerns of TS are the complex of problems around translating as a process and a product, i.e. “What are the many decisions translators must make,” and, as a product, i.e. “Is the translation an accurate representation of the original message?” These questions also have a central place in the study of interpreting. Interpreting, as both a skill and a science, focuses on the nature and transfer of meaning which are parallel concerns with TS.

Other concerns and ongoing discussions in common with TS include whether a translation should reflect the worldview of the author, or the worldview of the reader, or perhaps a bit of both (Munday, 2012). As translation expanded into scientific, technical, legal and business works, scholars came to focus on the communicative interaction between people who did not share a worldview, and TS turned to theories and research from communication, discourse studies, and cognitive linguistics, taking in the theoretical stances and methodologies from these disciplines (Munday, 2012). These are disciplines to which interpreting has also turned.

Not only has TS contributed to our basic understanding of interpreting processes and products, but many IS principles evolved from those first put forth in TS. As Pöchhacker (2004) notes, “the basic insights and ideas about translation may now be

feeding more directly into interpreting studies and enriching its theoretical foundations” (p. 48). Thus, the discipline of TS forms the bedrock from which IS emerges.

Through the Lens of Linguistics

Intertwined with translation and interpreting is linguistics, the discipline that studies language. Linguists understand that language is a dynamic activity in which participants think of themselves as doing things with language, such as persuading, narrating, entertaining, or explaining. Understanding linguistic forms and strategies that people use to convey meaning is the essential purpose of linguistic study in interpreting. Talk is an activity in which participants determine minute-by-minute the meaning of something that is said or signed. Knowing and recognizing ways of using language to convey and construct meaning is an essential skill for translators and interpreters.

Discourse and Discourse Analysis

Analyzing the linguistic activity between people is the study of discourse and discourse analysis. Discourse is language as it is actually expressed and understood by people engaged in a social interaction to accomplish a goal (Johnstone, 2002). This definition, developed in linguistics, aims to discover and describe how participants in a conversation make sense of what is going on within the social and cultural context of face-to-face interaction. And it is this type of discourse, face-to-face interaction, that interpreters are principally involved in.

Johnstone (2002) and Schiffrin (1994) have suggested that discourse analysis is a variety of methodological approaches that can answer many kinds of questions about human interaction. While as humans we all are analyzing discourse, interpreters need an overt awareness of what people are trying to accomplish as they talk or sign. This type of analysis requires concepts from disciplines like sociology that are borrowed into linguistics, now known as sociolinguistics. The findings of linguistic research, primarily discourse analysis, have provided a vast knowledge of how languages create meaning, the central concern of both translation and interpretation.

Through the Lens of Sociology and Anthropology

Until recently, the two areas of IS that have received the least attention are sociology and anthropology. As Pöchhacker (2004) suggests, anthropology and sociology have “played a relatively modest role in interpreting studies to date” (p. 50).

This might be in part because both disciplines focus on intangible, but highly influential, aspects of human life and partly because of our roots in translation which has only recently had a cultural turn.

Anthropology and sociology are disciplines that start with what can be seen, what people are doing in their everyday lives. The anthropologist and sociologist focus on the various interactions that people find themselves in throughout their lives, and refer to these interactions as 'the social.' These disciplines attempt to understand how people, in their everyday lives, are situated within a social world that is, to some degree, directing and impacting their actions. Because of their similar focus – the human condition—both disciplines have been influenced by many of the same scholars. Their similar focus should not be confused with a lack of distinction, as sociology and anthropology are different in what they aim to understand from their observations. These two fields, when combined, make up what Pöchhaker (2004/2016) refers to as “socio/cultural” approaches.

Identifying Power

A recurring theme throughout socio/cultural lens is identifying and exploring power dynamics. There are many scholars of sociology whose work is applicable and could be applied to the study of interpreting. These include Du Bois' (1903) work about “black folks”, Marx's (1954) analysis of capitalism, Collins' (2000) insight into the “matrix of domination”, and Smith's (1987) method of inquiry into the “organization of the everyday”. Within anthropology, it is the political economic tradition, which draws on the work of Marx, that focuses on power. This is because this tradition takes up the examination of ideology, a key theme with Marxism.

Another theorist whose analysis of power has influenced both fields is Michel Foucault (1972). He spent his career identifying and exploring power throughout history. In his analysis, he notes power is embedded in the everyday and exercised through various discourses. These discourses wield a lot of power and refers to the systems of thought that influence individuals. This means that power is no longer solely part of a large apparatus, like the State, but rather part of the fabric of social relations.

A recognition of power has become a part of the discourse in United States interpreting. The Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) now requires a certain number of continuing education units (CEUs) to be in courses or workshops on 'power, privilege,

and oppression'. As such, it would seem that the RID presumably has a clear definition of the meaning. But what is it? Sociologists and anthropologists would ask does it include issues of gender, sexuality, race, and ability? Or is it simply a way to talk about deaf and non-deaf dynamics? Who decides? These are the kind of questions that a sociocultural analysis of discourse could attempt to answer.

Through the Lens of Social Psychology

The field of social psychology is focused on how individuals interpret and assign meaning to the world around them. This body of work is found at the intersection of sociology and psychology. Through social psychology's micro-level analysis, we can explore how an individual experiences everyday events and interactions. There are three central, interdependent concepts that we get from social psychology: self, identity, and role.

One sociologist whose work often appears in IS because of his interest in self, identity, and role is Erving Goffman (1959). He observed and wrote about interactions among people. He posed questions about how people typically interact and enact different roles in different situations. Goffman used the analogy of theatre performances to describe interaction and its rituals.

Llewellyn-Jones and Lee (2014) apply the work of Goffman and a social psychological lens to the analysis of interpreters and roles. As part of their analysis they put forth a model of multiple roles for "describing the place that community interpreters have in the communicative interactions in which they work" (p. 148). In developing this model, they work to debunk the long-held notion (often by those outside the field) that there is one role interpreters occupy. Rather, they demonstrate that there are multiple roles a single interpreter may occupy throughout their career or even a given assignment. Similarly, each interpreter makes decisions based on their experiences, background, etc. And each of these decisions shapes the role occupied by the interpreter. Therefore, there cannot be one role for all interpreters.

As scholars who have taken up Goffman's work demonstrate, social psychology allows for a closer examination of human behavior and behaviors are interpreted by all the participants. His work allows us to ask questions like what it means for interpreters (students) to interact with members of Deaf communities? What are the behaviors and

identities we agree to when we decide to become interpreters? Social psychology can help us understand how these interactions are perceived and interpreted by all parties.

Understanding how our interpretations are shaped by the social context is important for all interpreters. This is not only important to the actual language work taught in interpreter education programs, but also for the interpersonal work that is a required component of any interpreting assignment (Stone & Brunson, 2020).

Through the Lens of Cognitive Psychology

In many ways, cognitive psychology, the final of the six lenses we will address, has influenced many of the models of interpreting that we use. Many of the concepts familiar in this field, such as working memory (WM), long term memory (LTM), and others, have gradually been woven into how we understand the cognitive mechanism that drives the linguistic processing of interpreting (see Llewellyn-Jones 1981). Most of this has entered our field via cognitive psychology, a field which combines the psychology of language and psycholinguistics.

More recently, with the development of greater experimental technique and equipment, cognitive psychologists have explored more directly the cognitive underpinnings of interpreting work. The work of interpreting is complicated and given the changing dynamics (e.g., teaming, videoconferencing interpreting, international interpreting, etc.) there is a need to understand the cognitive psychological processes interpreters are experiencing. As such we feel that the area of cognitive psychology, although new and complex for many of us, is worthy of inclusion as one of the academic foundations of IS.

From the mid 1990s onwards, we have started to see a greater exploration of cognitive issues in interpreting led by Moser-Mercer (1978) and others such as Christoffels, De Groot and Waldrop (2006). These studies have often explored specific aspects of the interpreting process: WM, articulatory suppression preventing sub-vocal articulatory rehearsal, LTM, the ever-increasing importance given to LTM -WM and its interaction in top-down processing and anticipation/prediction/inferencing. These help us to think more generally about why we prepare for interpreting work.

Cognitive psychologists continue to explore complex bilingual communication performance including simultaneous interpreting. This discipline continues to contribute

to IS knowledge regarding processing speed, psychomotor speed, cognitive control and task switching ability, working memory capacity, and mental flexibility (MacNamara et al., 2011; Stone, 2017). Investigating domain-general cognitive abilities and how they develop through interpreting training and as interpreters become experts are just a few of the studies possible within cognitive psychology.

Conclusion

For too long IEPs have focused on skills rather than encouraging students to think holistically about the work they do. We argue for a broader scope. Interpreting Studies, as transdisciplinary, relies on distinct fields of study to move forward and develop theories that explain interpreting in ways that move beyond the interpreted product. As we laid out in our book *The Academic Foundations of Interpreting Studies: An Introduction to Its Theories*, published by Gallaudet University Press (Roy, Brunson & Stone, 2018), the academic fields that make up the foundation of IS have a great deal to contribute to our understanding of interpreting. Our job as educators and practitioners is to become familiar with them and encourage our students and colleagues to do the same.

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