Studying Dialogue Interpreting: an Introduction

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In order to prepare the ground for what is to follow, we need to 'set aside' a series of assumptions which appear to underlie many studies on interpreting and to recall two factors that determined significant advances in Dialogue Interpreting (DI) research: 1. the introduction of the name "dialogue interpreting" by Mason (1999, 2009) and the consequent elaboration of the "dialogic discourse-based interaction (DI) paradigm" (Pöchhacker 2004); 2. what Straniero Sergio/Falbo (2012: 28) identify as the "social or sociological turn" taken by DI.

1. Dialogue interpreting, interpreting dialogue: the discourse-based interaction paradigm

The innovation brought about by Mason's (1999, 2009) definition, inspired by Wadensjö's seminal work (1993, 1998), is the interest in interaction and the interactionally-constructed context as the main factors affecting DI. The inescapable correlation between mode, setting and interaction type identifies DI with *a kind* (rather than *a mode*) of interpretation (cf. Falbo 2013), with particular attention devoted to "dialogue" as a co-constructed sense-making process involving all

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parties as co-authors of meaning in a given context. This has fostered the interest in DI on the part of disciplines studying what, elaborating on Linell (2009), Bres (2005), and Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2005), is referred to by Falbo (2012: 165-168) as "dialogue-like" discourse – as opposed to "monologue-like" discourse. The subsequent methodological cross-fertilisation resulted in the creation of synergies between Interpreting Studies (IS) and other scientific disciplines, including pragmatics (e.g. Mason 2006), applied linguistics (e.g. Lee 2009), sociolinguistics (e.g. Davidson 2000), interactional linguistics (e.g. Ticca/Traverso 2015), and Conversation Analysis (CA e.g. Gavioli 2014). Having deep sociological roots and being led, as it is, by the principle *why that now*, the CA (Sacks *et al*. 1974) analytical lens appears particularly well suited for observing DI, where interpreting what is being said necessarily requires an understanding of *why* it is being said at a specific point in conversation and addressing specific interlocutors (cf. Davidson 2002: 1276 and Davitti 2013: 177). Interaction as collective activity and unfolding negotiation of meaning requires what several authors (Linell 1998: 74; Wadensjö 1998) have referred to, in different ways, as *coordination*. In Wadensjö's perspective, in particular, coordination performed by interpreters is a crucial activity in interpreter-mediated interaction. It may be *explicit* or *implicit* (Wadensjö 1998), or, as Baraldi/Gavioli (2012) suggest, *basic* or *reflexive*: the former is strictly linked to the concept of (turn-based) talk as action, whereby participants talk (action) and react (re-action) to talk in order to make sense of what is said and done; the latter could be described as "a meta-communicative activity, whose aim is to resolve communication problems by, for instance, clarifying, expanding, repairing, questioning, or formulating understanding of the meaning of conversational actions" (Merlini 2015).[1] Dialogue interpreters' output, however, constitutes a special kind of re-action: it is not (only) a response *to* what has just been uttered, but (also) a version *of* what has just been uttered (cf. Mason 2006: 365). While IS have traditionally been concerned with interpreting as translating or relaying primary speakers' talk, research into coordinating activities was introduced at the end of the 1990s, accounting for interpreters' utterances that have no counterpart in preceding "originals" (non-renditions in Wadensjö's terms), but visibly respond to some social or communicative goal that needs to be met (Davidson 2000: 380).

Investigating interpreting as interaction has shed valuable light on "the socio-cultural, institutional and situational context as well as actual people in their respective roles and power positions" (Schäffner *et al.* 2013: 3). Interpersonal dynamics and socio-institutional aspects of discourse have stimulated the recent interest in conversational face-related issues of DI, regardless of the degree of confrontation (e.g. Merlini/Falbo 2011; Merlini 2013). When applying this approach, any kind of (dialogue-interpreted) institutional interaction may entail the presence of many participation frameworks, all of them, albeit diverse, requiring some kind of face-work and "the use of politeness by all parties involved" (Merlini 2015). Interlocutors cooperate not only in defining meanings, but also in terms of alignment, roles and identities. Alongside verbal components of discourse, supra-segmental elements and other "directly accessible features" (Mer-

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lini 2015), such as gestures, eye contact, positioning and facial expressions, play a significant role in sense making. Despite its significance, DI multimodality in general is still under-researched in the field of IS – with few, isolated exceptions (Wadensjö 2001; Bot 2005; Mason 2012; Davitti 2013). The growing number of projects and conferences devoted to multimodality seems however to indicate a turnaround in IS, where dialogue interpreters will no longer be "voices" but, to quote an expression used by Mondada (2014) in reference to other types of talk, "bodies in interaction".

2. The social turn: interpreting goes social

Despite their almost infant-like stage, DI studies account for a significant body of research when considering the many denominations they have been published under, such as "liaison interpreting" (Gentile *et al.* 1996), "community interpreting" (e.g. Hale 2007; Hlavac 2010; Wadensjö 2011; Remael/Carroll 2015), and/or "public service interpreting" (e.g. Corsellis 2008; Hale 2011; Valero-Garcés 2014). The initial tendency of identifying this kind of interpreting with the work setting in which it is performed may be linked to dialogue interpreter's behaviour, which, more than others, is strongly dependent on the implication "of a basic option as to what [they] are there for" (Marzocchi 2005: 102). In other words, DI does not happen in a "social vacuum" (Wadensjö 1998: 8) and is inextricably linked to specific environments and their norms, demands and needs. Taking the newly published *Routledge Encyclopedia of Interpreting Studies* as the most up-to-date and authoritative point of reference for defining IS concepts, we find that Merlini's (2015) entry on DI takes it as fundamentally linked to the community and/or public service environment, which involves a series of rules and conventionally accepted behaviours within the relevant institution, society and/or community. As a result, DI varies greatly at national and geographical level, being subject to local as well as international factors. Such variety of contexts is the reason why sufficiently flexible and wide-ranging international standards have not yet materialised (Remael/Carroll 2015) and the few existing ones either specifically deal with one setting at a time or overtly declare that – although aiming at comprehensiveness – some settings are not as represented as others, mainly due to varying requirements depending on national legislation, case law and/or other rules (e.g. García-Beyaerr *et al.* 2015).

Despite such stark differences, there is at least one aspect research on DI real-life data has highlighted unanimously: day-to-day practice is in contrast with the principle of interpreters' invisibility. Interpreters in community settings are co-participants and co-constructors of meaning, and yet non-personhood still prevails as an inherent element of the social role of the interpreter – at least in abstract terms (cf. Wadensjö 2008) and in many professional codes of conduct (AUSIT 2009). Furthermore, this issue appears to be much more complex and multifaceted than a simple polarisation of visible vs. invisible – and the parallel traditional dichotomy of impartial vs. cultural advocate model. As Martínez-Gómez (this issue) maintains, echoing Metzger (1999) and her interpreter's paradox, invisibility is traditionally linked to the perception of moral correctness

rather than empirical evidence – and is endorsed and enforced through training and professional ethics. This is why we felt that reference to non-professional DI practitioners had to be necessarily included in this Issue: non-professional interpreters lack exposure to the invisibility discourse and their behaviour may shed light on the constructions of one's own interpreter role based on actual interaction rather than acquired norms.

Even in cases where the highest possible degree of invisibility – or neutrality or impartiality – is achieved, institutional talk implies that at least one participant in the encounter is in charge of monitoring compliance with pre-established routines. In bilingual encounters this gate-keeping function is necessarily shared by institutional representatives and interpreters – who are therefore required to exert at least some form of control. As Solomon (1997: 91) puts it, referring to the medical setting, the focus "should not be on maintaining a distant neutrality, but on building shared meaning", thus allowing interpreters to "provide additional context, to say more than the physician may have said, or to ask questions of the physician that the patient might not have asked".

In countries where dialogue interpreters are seen as an integral part of the public services network, and their tasks are guided by official codes of ethics (e.g. AUSIT), the issue of coordination has been dealt with in detail, almost to the point of turning such codes into a sort of instruction manuals covering as many situations as possible. And yet, albeit useful in most cases, providing instructions hardly solves the issue of liability dialogue interpreters' participation entails. Dialogue interpreters are likely to "find [themselves] in delicate, uncomfortable situations, the results of which are manifested in many, often subtle ways", where "wide cultural gaps, power imbalance, urgent communication needs, lack of resources, lack of professional profile" create a constellation of circumstances "in which it would be difficult for any human being to remain unperturbed" (Martin/Valero-Garcés 2008: 2). And when ethics, rather than mere procedural cues, are concerned, how can the interplay between participation, agency and empowerment of the individual be regulated – and to what extent? While a number of studies have sufficiently showed what is incompatible with the 'neutrality' principle many codes of conduct are still anchored to (cf. Angelelli 2006 for a discussion), further empirical evidence is still needed to learn more about how interpreters build shared meaning (cf. Solomon 1997: 91-92) and "mediate" to handle or prevent conflicts but also, and mainly, misunderstandings (cf. Davitti 2013: 171). Contributions to the present Issue deal with these questions in different ways and from different angles, yet the invariable starting point of investigation is always communication and the achievement of shared (relevant) knowledge by all participants in the interaction. Shared knowledge, and possibly shared perspectives, inevitably depend on the presence of a common ground between parties speaking different languages and belonging to different cultures, highlighting the connection between coordination and intercultural mediation (cf. Baraldi/Gavioli 2012). According to Merlini (2015), mediation in this sense equates to a "double angle" kind of participation, with interpreters becoming "fully involved in the interaction as social actors in their own right", whose involvement "may foster – or thwart – agency by primary participants".

Influencing interlocutors' agency brings us back to the aspect of accuracy in relaying primary speakers' talk (cf. Baraldi/Gavioli 2014). As highlighted in this Issue (e.g. Gavioli, Martínez-Goméz, Merlini/Gatti, Nartwoska), dialogue interpreters often behave as *communication facilitators*, in other words experts of intercultural interaction acting on their own responsibility and performing linguistic and cultural mediation to provide effective communication. They are actively involved in the interaction at verbal level and are visible throughout the exchange thanks to interpreter-initiated clarification procedures.

3. An initial conclusion

If interpreting has gone "social" (cf. Pöchhacker 2006; Straniero Sergio/Falbo 2012), and is now qualified as *interaction*, *mediation*, and also *intervention* (cf. Gavioli/Maxwell 2007; Katan 2011), we currently lack authentic material regarding how this turn unfolds in practice and affects training. It is therefore our belief that both practice and training can highly benefit from accurate analyses of actual occurrences of interaction. And "while it is true that interactional occurrences are not generalizable", as Baraldi and Luppi (2015: 597) remind us, "they provide cases that can be fruitfully discussed by trainers and trainees", or among practitioners. We tend to agree with Merlini/Gatti and Vargas Urpi (this issue) on the appropriateness of a more comprehensive analysis of the interpreter at work, where the close-up observation of transcribed interactions goes along with more distanced analysis of DI events and participants by means of other analytical tools. For instance, questionnaire-based investigations in this Issue provide useful additional insights, showing that what interpreters do in practice may have less to do with their university degree than with a difficulty in understanding who they are as professionals in a given situation and, consequently, what they shall do. To quote just one of the respondents to Vargas-Urpi's survey, "She acknowledged not knowing how to introduce herself to Chinese users, as she did not feel comfortable with the label either of interpreter or of intercultural mediator, and sometimes just said *I will help you*". The italics in the original brings us back to the idea of service to one (or more) users, the "you" who are there with a specific goal (or set of goals) in mind and who equally participate in constructing meaning in the interaction. Hence the importance of promoting collaboration between universities training interpreters and services employing them, because if it is true that (dialogue) interpreting is done together, it is also true that one cannot avoid training those users who also contribute, with their (re)actions, to construing it. While understandably focusing on interpreters, this dedicated Issue also acknowledges that quality is a shared responsibility (cf. Hale *et al.* 2009; SIGTIPS 2011) and gives space to the other people involved. This is why the label *Dialogue* Interpreting has been chosen in the first place.

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