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Interpreting in the 21st Century: Challenges and opportunities
Edited by Giuliana Garzone and Maurizio Viezzi

Interpreting in the 21st Century Challenges and opportunities

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translation-oriented text, i.e. oriented towards the translator's own heuristics. When complex sub-codes are involved, such a text can be created in the time-constrained conditions of interpreting only if the interpreter is familiar with the options suggested by translation/interpreting theory.

Notes

1. Superanskaja's work offers an exhaustive discussion of the linguistic, historical and social problems connected with onomastics (starting from the semantic evolution of the term "proper names" itself, cf. 45–46). However, as in all the Soviet scientific literature on this subject, there are no references to two extremely important aspects which are of special interest for translators and interpreters: the relationship between the code and the bearer's ethnic origin, and translation from one language system to another. In the former case, there is reason to believe that this is, at least in part, due to a taboo.
2. However, this can be misleading: *Asia* can be a girl's name ("anthroponym"), *Aurora* a brand name, *Ambrógio* an animal name ("zooanthroponym") (for indications concerning correct onomastic terminology, see Podolskaja 1988).
3. The onomastic terminology I am using here is based on Podolskaja 1988. In any case, I think that, whatever the terminological model adopted, to use "patronymique" or "nom patronymique" instead of "nom de famille" or "family name", as Gile (1984: 81) does, can give rise to a degree of ambiguity.
4. I have discussed this aspect in a recent book, Salmon (forthcoming).
5. The classification of the degrees of foreign language acquisition/accluration proposed by Acton and Walker de Felix (1986: 22) comprises four levels: tourist, survivor, immigrant, citizen (i.e. native-like).
6. In ancient Russia, people fought for "the right to be addressed with the form -vič, i.e. with the patronymic (similarly, the "lower" suffix -ka was imposed by the upper classes on the lower social groups) (cf. Nikonov 1970: 51).
7. Although traditionally proper names — unlike common names — were considered to be purely denotative, it is now recognised that they also have a connotative value, carrying supplementary information. For a discussion of this issue, cf. Caprini (2001: 19–32).
8. On the macro-changes that have occurred in the Russian name code in the course of the 20th century, cf. Bondalev 1983: 128–129.
9. The term *Fonnye znanija* was introduced in the mid-70s by E.M. Vereščagin and V.G. Kostomarov.
10. Cf. for instance, a sentence like: "Ol'ga Forš had proposed to reformulate chronology starting from the birth date of a man called Džugašvilj" (S. Dovičarov, *Nashi*).
11. The same happened for *ebn*, an acronym for El'cyn Boris Nikolaevič: its first two letters trigger an association with one of the most popular vulgar words in the Russian language (a past tense form from verb *ebat'*, "to fuck").
12. On the contrary, when translating into Russian from languages that have expressions like "State Council", the interpreter can elegantly resort to the abbreviation *Gossovet*, based on unambiguous compounds.

Researching interpreting quality

Models and methods

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1. Introduction

As stated by a speaker in the opening session, the 1st Forth Conference on Interpreting Studies is in fact the third landmark conference on the study of interpreting to be hosted in Italy. Whereas the NATO Symposium in 1977 (Gerver and Sinaiko 1978) represented the heyday of interdisciplinarity and the Trieste Conference in 1986 (Gran and Dadds 1989) its 'Renaissance' (Gile 1994), the Forth Conference stands out for its broad conception of interpreting, embracing not only conference interpreting but also court, media, public-service and signed-language interpreting.

The Forth Conference and Proceedings are therefore an ideal environment for the present paper, which is based on work initiated for a special issue of *Meta* (Pöchhacker 2001). In an effort to overcome or at least narrow the divide between various domains of interpreting research, I will address the issue of 'quality', one of the main themes of the Conference and of Interpreting Studies in general, in an overarching perspective, encompassing research on conference as well as community-based interpreting. Following an attempt to model the concepts of 'interpreting' and 'quality', I will review the literature with regard to methodological approaches to quality-oriented research. Highlighting the common ground shared by those studying quality in interpreting, I hope to show the potential benefits for interpreting research of taking a broad view of the field and promoting a synergistic exchange among researchers in various domains of interpreting.

2. Models

2.1 Interpreting

On the assumption that there is something to gain by taking a comprehensive,

unifying view on interpreting before focusing on a particular domain for specific investigations, I suggest that 'interpreting' be viewed as a conceptual spectrum of different (proto)types of activity, distinguished by the extent to which they are governed by the constraints of a particular socio-cultural environment or institution. The concept of interpreting can thus be modelled as a bi-polar, inter- to intra-societal continuum (Figure 1).

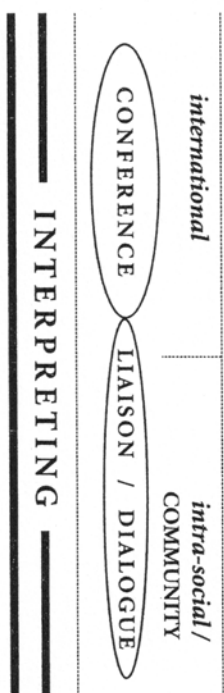


Figure 1. Conceptual spectrum of interpreting.

The domain of interpreting in an 'international setting' largely — but not fully — corresponds to what is usually labelled 'conference interpreting', whereas the domain on the right-hand side in Figure 1, interpreting within a particular socio-cultural community, system or institution, is obviously best captured by the term 'community interpreting'. More importantly perhaps, the model acknowledges the existence of a middle ground, with 'grey' areas, hybrid forms and fuzzy boundaries. Thus, it is not so much concerned with where to draw the line between one category or another but with highlighting that interpreting as a socio-communicative practice can and should be seen as a unified concept.

2.2 Quality criteria and standards

There is considerable agreement in the literature on a number of criteria which come into play when assessing the quality of interpreting. While the terminology may vary from one author or text to the other, concepts such as accuracy, clarity or fidelity are invariably deemed essential. These core criteria of interpreting quality are associated with the product-oriented perspective and focus primarily on the interpretation or target text as a 'faithful' image' (Gile 1991: 198) or 'exact and faithful reproduction' (Jones 1998: 5) of the original discourse. The notion of clarity (or linguistic acceptability, stylistic correctness, etc.), on the other hand, relates to a second aspect of quality, which could be described more generally as 'listener orientation' or target-text comprehensibility (cf. *fruitfulness* in Viezzi 1996: 100).

Beyond this two-pronged textual perspective, i.e. "intertextual" and "intra-textual" analysis (Shlesinger et al. 1997: 128), the interpreter is essentially expected

to "represent fully" the original speaker and his/her interests and intentions (cf. Gile 1991: 198). Harris (1990) labels this the "honest spokesperson" norm, formulated more specifically by Déjean Le Feal (1990: 155) as the criterion of 'equivalent effect'. Finally, the focus of quality assessment may be neither on the source text nor on listeners' comprehension or speakers' intentions but on the process of communicative interaction as such. From this perspective, which foregrounds the '(inter)activity' of interpreting rather than its nature as a 'text-processing task' (cf. Wadensjö 1998: 21ff), quality essentially means "successful communication" among the interacting parties in a particular context of interaction.

As indicated above, the various sets of criteria for quality in interpreting pertain to different aspects or even conceptions of the interpreter's task, ranging from text processing to communicative text production for a certain purpose and effect and, most generally, to the function of facilitating communicative interaction. As depicted in Figure 2, the model of quality standards ranging from a lexico-semantic 'core' to the socio-pragmatic sphere of interaction can be viewed as reflecting the fundamental duality of interpreting as a service to enable communication and as a text-production activity (cf. Viezzi 1996: 40).

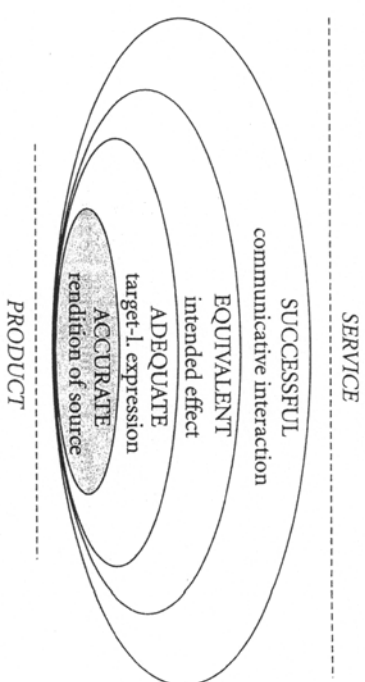


Figure 2. Quality standards for the product and service of interpreting.

2.3 Perspectives on quality

The more one focuses on interpreting as a service to enable communication in a particular constellation of interaction, the more easily one will accept that the degree of 'success' — or indeed any other criterion of quality — is necessarily judged from a particular (subjective) perspective in and on the communicative event. As modeled in Figure 3, the "communication configuration" (Gile 1991) typically includes not only the interpreter and the users — in the roles of sender/

text producer (ST-P) and target-text receiver (TT-R) — but also the “Client” who commissions and pays for the service as well as the interpreter’s colleague(s).

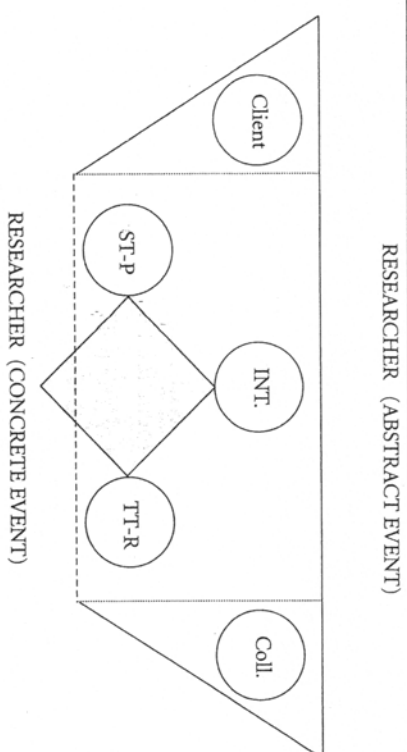


Figure 3. Perspectives on quality in interpreting.

As suggested by Viezzi (1996: 12), the perspective(s) of those involved more or less directly in the communicative event can be distinguished from that of the ‘external observer’ who takes a research approach to interpreting and is interested in measuring ‘objective’ features, particularly of the textual product, or else capturing subjective attitudes and judgements.

Given these multiple perspectives on and dimensions of quality as discussed and modelled above, there is a broad range of methodological approaches to the study of quality in interpreting. The following section will give an overview of quality-related research methods and topics with reference to interpreting in both conference and community settings.

3. Methodological approaches

Empirical studies on quality in interpreting have been carried out along various methodological lines, the most popular and productive of which has been survey research. More indirectly, but consistently, the issue of ‘performance’ assessment has also been dealt with in experimental studies. Comparatively fewer researchers have focused on the analysis of authentic textual corpora and of individual cases.

With reference to these major methodological orientations as well as to the various assessment standards and perspectives on ‘quality’ modelled above (Figures 2 and 3), I will now attempt to review the state of the art in research on quality on

the basis of some exemplary studies. Since work on interpreting in conference settings is largely covered by other papers in this volume, more attention and space will be devoted to the presentation of research on quality in the domain(s) of community interpreting.

3.1 Survey research

Survey research on the basis of questionnaires or structured interviews targeting one or more positions in the constellation of communicative interaction has been conducted both from the generic perspective, often with reference to the interpreter’s task as such, and with reference to concrete interpreting events.

3.1.1 Interpreters

If interpreting is viewed in its duality as a service, rendered by an individual (or group, team, etc.), and as a textual product, the issue of quality can be formulated as ‘What makes a good interpreter?’ and ‘What makes a good interpretation?’ These generic questions have been asked in surveys addressed to interpreters and/or users of interpreting since the 1980s. In Australia, Hearn (1981) and co-workers surveyed a total of 65 interpreters in an evaluation of two regional interpreting services. One of the 65 question items covered in personal interviews focused on the qualifications of a ‘good interpreter’ and yielded such criteria as knowledge of both languages and of the migrant culture, objectivity, socio-communicative skills, reliability, responsibility, honesty, politeness and humility (Hearn et al. 1981: 61). The interpreters were also asked about their perception of attitudes and expectations prevailing among their professional clients, particularly regarding the definition and acceptance of the interpreter’s role and task. A separate question addressed the issue of ‘cultural mediation’, which has been of prime concern to those reflecting on the community interpreter’s role and was also addressed in the survey by Mesa (1997) described further down.

In her pilot study among conference interpreters, Bühler (1986) had 47 conference interpreters rate the relative importance of criteria like endurance, poise, pleasant appearance, reliability and ability to work in a team. At around the same time, 39 members of the German region of AIIC were interviewed about issues of their profession, and a long list of prerequisites emerged for a ‘good interpreter’ and team member, ranging from linguistic and general knowledge to voice quality, and from good health and endurance to psychosocial qualities such as appearance, poise, politeness and flexibility (cf. Feldweg 1996: 326–378).

An innovative attempt to use Bühler’s (1986) criteria for a ranking task in an Internet survey is presented by Nocella (forthcoming).

3.1.2 Users

Prompted by Bühler's (1986) attempt to generalise from her findings to the quality needs and expectations of users (listeners), questionnaire-based user expectation surveys were introduced by Kurz (1989a) and turned into a highly productive line of research (cf. Kurz 1993a; Mack and Cattaruzza 1995; Moser 1996; Collados Als 1998). While some of the user surveys narrowed the focus to Bühler's product-related ('linguistic') criteria, particularly for simultaneous interpretation, others broadened it to include aspects of the interpreter's role and the specifics of consecutive interpretation and particular meeting types (e.g. Marrone 1993; Vuorikoski 1993). A significant distinction was made by Kopczynski (1994b) between the preferences of users as 'speakers' as opposed to 'listeners' in a conference setting. While the former would tolerate a greater extent of intervention by the interpreter, the latter showed a stronger preference for the 'ghost role' of the interpreter and favoured a close rendition of the speaker's words and even mistakes (cf. Kopczynski 1994b: 195ff).

In community interpreting, where bilateral short consecutive ('liaison') interpreting of dialogue is the most common mode by far, the distinction between the two user roles is of a different nature. Whereas the primary interacting parties will usually take alternating turns at speaking and listening, they are essentially different in their status as 'representatives' as opposed to 'clients' of an institution or public service. It is thus common to refer to 'service providers' or 'professionals' on the one hand and 'non-(majority-language)-speaking clients' on the other. Both of these 'user perspectives' — as well as that of the interpreters — were investigated by Mesa (1997), who administered questionnaires to 66 clients (in 11 different languages) and 288 health care workers from 30 different institutions in the Montréal region. Whereas the former were asked about their perception of the quality of interpreting services received (see below), the latter were asked to rate the importance of over 30 interpreter qualities and behaviours on a three-point scale (*très – assez – peu important*). In the survey of service provider expectations, the items which received the highest ratings ('very important') from most of the respondents included 'fully understands client's language' (96%), 'ensures confidentiality' (95%), 'points out client's lack of understanding' (92%), 'refrains from judgement' (91%) and 'translates faithfully' (90%). Strikingly, however, the expectation that the 'cultural interpreter' generally 'explains cultural values' ranked low among service providers' expectations (61% 'very important'), and even fewer respondents (47%) considered it very important to receive cultural explanations from the interpreter after the mediated exchange.

Service providers' expectations of what interpreters ought to do in various institutional settings were also investigated in two questionnaire-based surveys conducted in Vienna. Pöchhacker (2000b) collected responses from 629 health care and social workers on interpreter qualifications and role definitions. Out of ten

criteria, such as linguistic and cultural competence, general education, specialised knowledge, training in interpreting, strictly neutral behaviour, and discreteness and confidentiality, only the latter two were rated 'very important' (on a three-point scale) by a majority of respondents. Nevertheless, user expectations among these service providers were highly demanding. More than two thirds of respondents saw such editorialising functions as simplifying and explaining provider utterances and summarising of client utterances as part of the interpreter's task, and 62% each also expected interpreters to explain cultural references and meanings and to formulate autonomous utterances when asked to do so by the provider. An analysis of the data by professional groups (doctors, nurses, therapists, social workers) yielded a number of significant differences. Thus, nurses tended to construe the interpreter's role much more broadly than doctors, whereas social workers showed much greater acceptance for the interpreter's role as a cultural mediator. As in the study by Mesa (1997), hospital interpreters themselves felt much more strongly than health care personnel that providing cultural explanations was part of their job (83% vs. 59%).

Kadic (2000) used a similar questionnaire-based approach to ascertain user expectations regarding the qualifications and task definition of courtroom interpreters. Her target population consisted of some 200 local court judges in Vienna. As regards qualifications, the 133 respondents rated 'interpreting skills' and, in second place, 'linguistic and cultural competence' more highly than 'basic legal knowledge' and 'knowledge of court organisation and procedure'. Asked about their definition of the interpreter's task, the judges turned out to be less restrictive than one might expect from the literature (cf. Morris 1995), showing considerable acceptance of summarising (46%), simplifying the judge's utterances (63%), explaining legal language (72%) and even formulating routine questions and admonitions on behalf of the judge (72%). As many as 85% of respondents expected the interpreter to explain cultural references for the court.

Since the local court judges surveyed by Kadic (2000) are also responsible for hiring interpreters when needed, the study is unique in that it also addresses the perspective of the 'client' in the broader sense of the term as described below.

3.1.3 Clients

In the literature on community interpreting, the role of 'client' is usually taken to refer to the individual client of the institution or public service, and thus to the interpreter's 'individual' as opposed to 'professional client' in the communicative exchange. In a more general sense, however, the interpreter's client must also be seen as the individual or institution that commissions — and pays for — his or her services. Notwithstanding the pivotal role of the client — in the sense of 'employer' — in the constellation of interpreting as a professional service, the quality expectations associated with this position have received very little attention. The study by Kadic (2000) on courtroom interpreting points to the specifics of this perspective

on quality by investigating 're-hiring criteria', such as 'smooth facilitation of communication', and eliciting additional concerns such as costs and fees (cf. Kadric 2000: 126–136).

In the area of conference interpreting, a major survey on quality from the employer perspective has been undertaken by the Joint Interpreting and Conference Service of the European Commission (SCIC), the world's largest client of interpreting services. Not surprisingly, the study adds cost and management considerations to the list of quality-related concerns and thus addresses the dimension of the service as well as that of individual interpreters and their work.

3.1.4 Case-based surveys

Apart from surveys designed to elicit normative views and expectations regarding a more or less abstract notion of interpreting and interpreters, survey research has also been carried out with reference to quality in concrete conference interpreting events (e.g. Gile 1990, Marrone 1993). For community interpreting settings, a case-based cumulative survey method was developed and applied by a Canadian cultural interpreter service (Garber and Mauffette-Leenders 1997). Feedback from 34 non-English-speaking clients in three language groups (Vietnamese, Polish, Portuguese) was obtained by way of translated questionnaires which were given out by 17 interpreters in a total of 72 assignments. Among other things, clients were asked to rate comprehensibility on a six-point scale and to state their perception of the quality of interpreting with reference to criteria such as accuracy and impartiality. A more elaborate evaluation form was used for service providers in the same encounters, thus implementing a quality assurance system covering both individual client and service provider perspectives. The survey by Mesa (1997) already mentioned above made a similar distinction between the individual client and the service provider perspective. Whereas the 66 clients (of eleven different language backgrounds) were asked mainly to express their agreement (or disagreement) with ten evaluative statements on features of the interpreter's performance, service providers were asked to complement their generic user expectation ratings by stating to what extent ('yes' – 'more or less' – 'no') they had seen the members of the interpreting service under study actually fulfilling those expectations.

3.2 Experimentation

Experimental studies on (simultaneous) interpreting since the 1960s have shown a keen interest in the impact of various input parameters (e.g. speed, noise) on the interpreter's 'performance'. While experiments did not explicitly address the issue of quality as such, looking at interpreters and at 'how well they do under particular circumstances' is certainly linked up with quality assessment or at least a particular aspect of it.

3.2.1 Measures of performance

Many experiments have been designed in such a way as to measure the presumably essential parameter of 'accuracy'. (For a more detailed discussion, see Vuorikoski forthcoming). Error counts (e.g. Barik 1971), scores of 'informativeness' as well as 'comprehensibility' (Gerver 1971a), various types of propositional — or verbal — accuracy scores (e.g. Mackintosh 1983; Strong and Fritsch-Rudser 1992; Tommola and Lindholm 1995; Lee 1999a) and even acoustic synchronicity patterns (Lee 1999b; Yagi 1999) have all been used, more or less confidently, as objective measures of interpreting performance in experimental settings.

Only some authors explicitly acknowledge that their 'scoreable textual parameters' cover only a certain 'aspect of quality', if they reflect 'quality' at all. Mackintosh (1983: 15), for instance, who used a complex semantic scoring system and calculated inter-rater reliability among her three judges, clearly stated: "In any exercise designed to permit a qualitative assessment of interpretation products, it would be necessary to refine the scoring system." A similar acknowledgement of the limitations of his error coding system is formulated by Barik (1971: 207): "Nor is the system intended to reflect except in a very gross way on the adequacy or 'quality' of an interpretation, since other critical factors such as delivery characteristics: voice intonation, appropriateness of pausing, etc., are not taken into consideration" (for recent work on such delivery features, see Ahrens forthcoming and Mead, in this volume).

While this problem remains largely unresolved (cf. Gile, in Niska 1999a: 120), some progress has been made by using (some feature of) quality not as the dependent but as the experimental input variable.

3.2.2 Quality as input variable

Studies involving the manipulation of output quality features in the experimental design have tended to focus on the dimension of target-text adequacy for a particular audience. This approach to experimentation in interpreting was pioneered by Berk-Seligson (1988) in her research on court interpreting. She presented a group of mock jurors with two stylistically different versions of a court interpreter's rendering of witness testimony and was able to show that variations in register (politeness) will significantly affect the way in which listeners perceive and judge the original speaker's credibility, in this case as a witness.

In the area of simultaneous conference interpreting, two innovative studies have focused on precisely the feature that was found to be relatively unimportant in a number of user expectation studies. Shlesinger (1994) presented listeners with two versions of a target text, one delivered with what she analysed as "interpretational intonation", the other read with standard rhythm, stress and prosodic patterns. In a comprehension and recall test administered to her two groups of subjects, the group which had listened to the read version with standard intonation gave 20% more correct answers than the group listening to the interpretation. In another

experiment on the impact of intonation, Collados Als (1998) produced three intonationally and/or informationally different interpreted versions of a (simulated) conference speech and asked experienced users of simultaneous interpretation to judge the quality of the interpretation with the help of a questionnaire. Even though the same subjects had confirmed the relative insignificance of non-verbal features in a prior user expectation survey, their direct assessment of the quality of the (simulated) interpretation and of the interpreter demonstrated a significant impact of the monotonous intonation in the experimental input material.

Each of the studies mentioned above touch on 'quality' in terms of the cognitive or pragmatic effect of the interpretation on the listeners, thus addressing the criterion of 'equivalent effect' as formulated by Déjean Le Féal (1990: 155). In methodological terms, these experiments also share the use of simulation as a key feature in their research design and thus manage to overcome some of the limitations of laboratory experiments in which, by definition, most of the variables of an authentic communicative setting remain out of view and in which the absence of a user or client invariably leaves the dangling question of 'quality (adequacy) for whom?'

3.3 Corpus-based observation

Compared to surveys and experiments, there are relatively few studies of interpreting based on the observation of authentic textual corpora. Cokely (1992) analysed 'interpreter miscues' in a corpus of ten authentic sign language interpretations in a conference setting. Pöchhacker (1994a) described quality-related features of the text surface such as interference, hesitation, slips and shifts, as well as problems of coherence in five pairs of original speeches and interpretations, and Kalina (1998) lists 'product analysis' performed on authentic as well as experimental corpora as the methodological basis of a dozen empirical studies, including research on issues like intonation, interference, errors and self-corrections. A large-scale corpus analysis of simultaneous interpreting in the European Parliament, covering four languages, has been undertaken by Vuorikoski (forthcoming).

However detailed the textual analyses in such studies, the findings from the observation of authentic textual corpora are largely subject to the same kind of limitation as the experimental studies discussed above, i.e. the researcher will gain a view on only one set of features rather than come to a more multi-dimensional assessment of quality. The use of transcripts, to begin with, obviously truncates and distorts the semiotically complex textual product under study. Moreover, at least in the area of conference interpreting, there has been a strong bias in favour of discrete and quantifiable textual features, such as errors, omissions, etc., with little regard to complex psycho-communicative relationships and effects. (For a more functional approach to error analysis, see Falbo forthcoming).

In the literature on community interpreting, there are very few examples of quantitative analysis of textual corpora (e.g. Ebdén et al. 1988). Rather, the subject — not necessarily of quality — has been dealt with mainly on a qualitative basis. A pertinent example is the study by Jacobsen (forthcoming) on various types of additions, including explanations of culture-bound items, in both a simulated and an authentic court interpreting corpus.

The application of discourse analytical methods to the study of interpreting performance is a relatively recent development (cf. Mason 1999a). Notwithstanding its potential, it must be acknowledged that observational studies based on authentic textual corpora alone will be insufficient to the task of evaluating interpreting quality in concrete communicative interactions. On the assumption that quality is a multidimensional socio-psychological as well as textual phenomenon within a specific institutional and situational context of interaction, the observational study of quality is arguably best served by an approach which allows the researcher to collect a maximum of information on a single case.

3.4 Case study

The concept of case study as characterised by Robson (1993: 5), with particular emphasis on the combination of various observational techniques, has not been very common in interpreting research to date. Its application to research on interpreting quality would suggest the combination of corpus-based observation, survey research (interviews), participant observation and documentary analysis so as to ensure a holistic view on quality also at the levels of intended effect and successful interaction.

There are a few studies in which some of these design features are taken into account. Gile (1990) used a questionnaire and reported on his impressions of textual output quality. However, he did not engage in systematic corpus analysis or discuss his approach as a participant observer. Similarly, Marrone (1993) used a questionnaire but did not consider corpus analysis. Since he himself was involved in the case in the role of (consecutive) interpreter, he did install an observer 'to monitor' events in the light of the questionnaire's parameters" (Marrone 1993: 36) but did not report on the data from that source. Pöchhacker (1994a), in his conference case study, used corpus-based data analysis, participant observer notes and documentary analysis but failed to gain sufficient access to conference participants with his user assessment survey.

The most successful example of the use of case study research in interpreting is probably the work of Wadensjö (1998), who recorded and analysed a large corpus of authentic discourse, participated in the interpreted events as an observer, and conducted post-interaction interviews. (For the use of retrospection in the analysis of simultaneous interpreting, see Vilk-Tuovinen, in this volume.) Given Wadensjö's

(1998) descriptive orientation, she largely avoids discussing her data in terms of quality. She does however discuss the prospects of applying her methodological approach to "the whole issue of evaluating (the degree of) interpreters' professional skill" (Wadensjö 1998: 286).

4. Conclusions

Against the background of the conceptual dimensions and methodological approaches reviewed in this paper, the issue of quality stands out as a particularly complex research problem. As has been shown, the various facets of the issue — from textual criteria and communicative standards to the interpreter's qualifications and role as well as the multiple perspectives on interpreting as a professional service — have all been recognised and investigated, albeit to a varying extent, for different forms of interpreting activity across the typological spectrum. On the whole, there is a lot of conceptual and methodological common ground, and considerable potential for mutual enrichment between various domains of interpreting research. Thus, work in the field of community interpreting on issues like the interpreter's role and the impact of specific institutional constraints could profitably be taken up in studies of bilateral interpreting in international settings, while researchers studying the whispering mode used in community-based interpreting might turn to the literature on simultaneous conference interpreting for available methods and findings. Clearly, there is also ample room for researchers to co-operate in improving techniques for the (corpus-)linguistic analysis of textual/discourse data. The same holds true for the need to develop elaborate multi-method case-study designs for the in-depth investigation of concrete interpreting events.

Overall, then, this paper is essentially a plea for promoting the discipline of Interpreting Studies by adopting a broader view, of the object under study as well as the research questions and research methods. Considering the complexity of the task facing those who would study 'quality' in interpreting, it should be a win-win proposition for researchers across the typological spectrum from conference to community interpreting to look beyond the conceptual and methodological horizons of their particular specialty and find both new challenges and opportunities in researching interpreting quality.

Quality and norms in interpretation

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While the proposal to extend the application of the concept of norms to interpreting has so far had relatively few advocates (originally Shlesinger 1989 and Harris 1990; more recently Schjoldager 1995; Gile 1999a), it could provide a flexible framework for research in this field. This paper proposes its use as a key concept in quality research.

The elusiveness of the concept of quality is a recurrent theme in the literature on interpreting (e.g.: Shlesinger et al. 1997: 122). Incidentally, its definition has become increasingly complicated as, in time, research in this sector has left behind a purely "linguistic" and "technical" approach and moved towards a broader view, based on a notion of interpretation as a complex interactional and communicative event encompassing pragmatic and sociolinguistic factors (e.g. Pöchhacker 1995b; Vierz 1996). Evidence of this can be found, for instance, in the uncertainties that have emerged over the definition of "errors",¹ which seemed uncontroversial in the 1970s when a purely (inter)linguistic perspective prevailed and the text was seen as a "document" rather than a "message" (Sager 1997: 27).

The basic problem is that quality is the sum of several different, heterogeneous aspects, some of which involve different subjects — interpreters, clients, users, speakers — each with a different view and perception of quality, as research has shown (Kurz 1993a, 1993b; Kopiczynski 1994a; Moser 1996). There are variations even within the same group: among users, quality expectations tend to vary, reflecting not only the kind of events where simultaneous interpretation (SI) is provided, but also individual tastes and criteria, often related to socio-linguistic factors. This is made more problematic by the inherent evanescence of the product, which is difficult to inspect and does not lend itself to repeated evaluation. Although transcription turns it into an analysable material object, there is no doubt that to analyse an oral text in written form is not only methodologically incorrect, but also ineffective, owing to the important role of prosody in the expression of meaning. Even Pöchhacker's "trans-description" system (Pöchhacker 1994c: 236ff), which records some of the features of oral language (pauses, voiced and unvoiced