Keynote: How Interpreters Construct Messages

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Abstract

Interpreters are, at a minimum, bilingual. How communication takes place goes beyond that for an interpreter as we must become an essential part of the healthcare delivery team and need to understand how our communication crosses language boundaries. This presentation digs deeper into how interpreters navigate the cultural and linguistic components of an encounter, specific attitudes and beliefs, and what is happening when we are going in and out or switching languages. It covers concepts such as code-switching, translanguaging, and proficiency that will help interpreters understand how the lens changes in communication, the key to an interpreting encounter and how our proficiency assessment needs to take this into consideration.
Learning Objectives

- understand how we use language for different purposes
- understand how “bilingualism” and “biculturalism” varies from person to person, and how we became bilingual/bicultural affects how we use words and phrases in different contexts
- define concepts like code-switching and translanguaging and their role in constructing messages
- consider different perspectives on how we view language proficiency
- learn about changes in how we view what it means to be bilingual, and new approaches in interpreter and translator education/training
Using languages for different purposes

• Where do we use language?
• Where do we not use language?
• Language use is ubiquitous
• Synonyms – everywhere, omnipresent, universal, all-over, wall-to-wall
Using languages for specific purposes

Languages for the Professions and Specific Purposes (LPSP)

Curricular development started 40+ years ago mostly in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), developing into World Languages for Specific Purposes (WLSP)

• Medical Spanish
• German for Business
• Arabic for Engineering, etc.

Translation/Translation Studies (Holmes) and Interpreting/Interpreting Studies (Pöchhacker, Schlesinger).
What is the first thing you saw?
How the bilingual brain is wired
Evolving knowledge of communication
Put it in the box
Bucket – let’s water it all at once
Language is not just words

• Idiolect – we all have our own way of speaking that is unique to ourselves

• Metalanguage – the language or vocabulary used to talk about language. Can be specific to a field, such as terminology used in prescriptions

• Non-verbal communication - gestures, sounds, intonation patterns, everything that makes us comprehensible, but unique

• Henrietta ordered another suit online from Macy’s.

• Message is made by the speaker, but the listener constructs the meaning
What does this mean to you?
Taboos

- Gosh
- Darn
- Damn
- $hit
- F**k
- Mofo
• Bilingual = having or expressed in two languages
• Bicultural = Having or combining the cultural attitudes and customs of two nations, peoples, or ethnic groups
• Michael Agar, “...language and culture are inseparable.” 1994, coined the term “languaculture”
• Bilingualism – circumstantial, or purposeful, Second Language Acquisition (SLA)
Language proficiency

https://www.languagetesting.com/actfl-proficiency-scale
Start your Engines:
Bilingualism and biculturalism

- Ofelia García, professor and researcher in dual language programs
- Multilingualism – dominant language L1, and L2, L3
- Plurilingualism – competency possibilities in L2, L3 > Language A, B, C
- Based on language hierarchies
- Translanguaging – does away with language hierarchies and returns the power to the speaker. The speaker selects their repertoire as they construct communication
Code-switching

• Alternating between two languages within a single conversation or sentence

• Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez pronouncing name
  • https://thehill.com/homenews/media/435042-ocasio-cortez-takes-aim-at-fox-host-for-mocking-her-name-pronunciation

• AOC “verbal blackface”

• Anyone can code-switch to make themselves culturally compatible
If by ‘the Latina thing,’ she means I actually do the work instead of just talk about it, then yeah, I’m doing ‘the Latina thing.’

Unless of course she’s talking about being multilingual, which we know isn’t a ‘Latina thing.’

It’s a ‘21st century’ thing.
Translanguaging-1

• “Using language as a unitary meaning making system of the speakers,” Ofelia García

• Selecting from my unitary repertoire of signs – I recognize them as English, and you recognize them as English

• Bilinguals do not have two sets of language - they have one language repertoire and select features that are appropriate to communicate

• Her ‘Ah, ha’ moment, quoting child, “Spanish runs through my heart, but English runs through my veins.”

• https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5l1CcrRrcK0
Translanguaging-2

- External society perspective – there are named languages.
- English is a language. Spanish, French, Swahili, is a language.
- We test named languages.
- Start at the epistemology of a bilingual child
- Internal perspective of the language – a unitary meaning, an intertwined entity of words and culture
- From the internal perspective, speaker doesn’t know where one ends, and one begins.
Confirming García but bilingual through SLA

• Judith Kroll (psychologist, Penn State U) thinks this constant cognitive challenge that bilinguals face may be responsible for an observed improvement in what’s called executive function, or the ability to filter out unnecessary information and make decisions. Other researchers doubt that bilingualism has any effect on executive function, citing small sample sizes and a failure to replicate many positive results.

• Early research and bilingual education thought language mixing was not acceptable. Kroll, “It’s actually a normal and typical part of bilingual experience. I don’t have two monolingual minds operating separately in one head. I have one bilingual brain.”

• https://www.wired.com/2016/02/being-bilingual-changes-the-architecture-of-your-brain/
New approaches to interpreter education and training (García)

• Shift in how we think about how we’re teaching
• Design methods that do not just focus on the hierarchical view of language pairs
• Focus on unitary voice rather than isolated entities.
• Does the L1-L2, LA-LB scaffolding approach used for traditional SLA curriculum classes work for bilinguals?
Non-professional interpreting and translation (NPIT)
Clarification of context (interpreting)

• Non-professional interpreting in the management of emergencies, disasters and conflicts

• Child language and cultural brokering

• “Non-professional” refers non-judgmentally to the fact that a given profession or activity is carried out by laypeople, i.e. people who are not qualified in that profession, referred to as *ad hoc* interpreters.

• Research also referred to as “circumstantial bilinguals” or people who have not chosen to become bilinguals but are somehow forced to do so due to life circumstances, e.g. children of migrants (Angelleli).
Professional
Non-Professional

- Formal education or training
- Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice
- Recruited
- Paid
- Certified, sworn
- Status

- Learned by experience
- Circumstantial
- Volunteer
- Relationship based
- Community ties
- Age and status not considered

Current Commonality

WHO
Case studies

- How interpreters/mediators handle cultural differences
- Intercultural adaptation vs. cultural essentialism
- Role of lay interpreters, ‘social peers’ or ‘expert’
- Specialized terminology
- Children as language brokers
Teaching experience – personal experience with the L1 EN to L1 SP

- Need to modify learning objectives
- Same course, different experiences in learners, incorporate learners’ experiences into their linguistic space
- Mindset differences in L1 EN and L1 SP
- Re-focus on language proficiency and translanguaging when working with SP L1.
- Assessment modification to accommodate linguistic repertoire
- Differences in intercultural approaches to interpreting
- Modification in peer review
Low person on the totem pole
Thank you

• MassAHEC Network
• University of Massachusetts Medical School
• MassHealth
Works Cited and Resources


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