

AL-FARABI KAZAKH NATIONAL UNIVERSITY
International Relations Department
Chair of Diplomatic Translation
Translation business in the field of international and legal relations
Practice of Simultaneous Interpretation
2021-2022 academic year spring semester

Lecture

Module 3: Cognitive Aspects in Simultaneous Interpretation

Lecture 14: Translator's role in Simultaneous Interpretation

Plan of the lecture

1. Introduction
2. The communication actors' aims and professional loyalty
3. Conclusion
4. References

Aspects of the lecture

1. Convergence and divergence of aims
2. Professional loyalty
3. The Translator's position

Goals of the lecture

1. Identify the Translator in SI
2. Identify Sender's and Receiver's role in SI
3. Explain the notion of "translator" in cross-cultural communication

Basic concepts

Sender, receiver, didactic orientation, rotating side-taking, single-sided loyalty, dialogue
Interpreting, community interpreting and etc.

The question of professional loyalty is therefore a very real one: to whom is it due? To the Client? To the Sender? To the Receiver? The question is not only ethical or 'philosophical' issue; as will be shown later, it has practical implications.

One fundamental determinant of a professional activity involving an employer and an employee are the employee's duties towards the employer. In the case of an independent service provider, his/her duties are determined by the service contract

signed with the client. This also applies to professional Translators – see Gouadec 1989, 2002, Robinson 1997. Incidentally, the Translator's livelihood depends on the Client, not on the Sender or Receiver. This is one of the reasons why conference interpreters, who are often recruited by colleagues (who therefore become 'Clients' in a way even though they are not the ones who pay them), may attach more weight to their reputation in the profession than to feedback from conference delegates.

As a professional, the Translator owes his/her loyalty to the Client first and foremost. There are of course limits to what any employee or service provider will accept, and if the Client's brief is strongly objectionable on legal or moral grounds, Translators can refuse it, but such cases seem to be rare. Moreover, in the field, the Client's brief and interests are generally compatible with the Sender's and the Receiver's aims. This does not mean that they are necessarily convergent. Problems do occur, but they involve mostly prioritization of resources and optimization rather than opposing interests. If the

Client

is a translation company, translations which satisfy Senders and receivers are also satisfactory for him/her because they are liable to help generate good business. On the other hand, as mentioned above, in order to gain a larger market share, translation companies may wish to offer faster and cheaper translation services than their competitors. This is no longer necessarily in line with the aims or interests of Senders or Receivers, because optimizing the commissioned translation requires time, and having to work at cheap rates will not necessarily encourage translators to give their very best to the job. The Client's brief can be considered an environmental constraint: the

Translator

needs to meet the requirements of the Senders and/or Receivers subject to certain constraints of time, remuneration and perhaps access (translation companies, in particular, may worry about losing their own clients, that is, the Senders or Receivers, to the Translator if s/he is given direct access to them).

Once this environmental constraint is taken on board, whose aims and interest should the Translator serve? The Sender's or the Receiver's? The prevailing position is probably that in most circumstances, the Translator functions as an alter ego of the author or speaker. In written translation, this position is morally 'natural' because setting aside literary texts, readers tend to perceive the text they are reading as the author's, not the translator's. The translator thus represents the author and intuitively, it would seem wrong to betray him/her by serving another party's interest without indicating so explicitly. In simultaneous conference interpreting, the same position is

standard and is reflected in a norm: interpreters use the first person generally, and they tell listeners explicitly when speaking on their own behalf (“the interpreter cannot hear because the microphone is off”, “the interpreter missed the name”, etc.). The fact that they sometimes depart from this position (see a case study in Diriker 2004) does not change this Sender loyalty principle. The situation can be different in court interpreting, where the principals’ interests can be strongly divergent and even confrontational and interpreters may need to observe specific rules which impose strong adherence to the form of statements they interpret.

The Translator’s position as representing the Sender, and therefore his/her aims and interests, does not mean that the Receivers’ interests are not heeded, at least as long as they are compatible with the Client’s and with the Sender’s. This is most often the case in informational Texts aimed at informing or explaining, insofar as it is in the Receivers’ interests to be informed and to understand.

In interpreter training programmes for spoken languages, the Translator’s position is often defined as ‘neutral’ with a role sometimes referred to as a transparent ‘conduit role’. In Translation Studies, this role is now being challenged (see for example Angelelli 2004 for interpreting). In signed-language interpreting circles, it does not seem to prevail at all – as can be seen clearly in several papers in Janzen 2005 and as discussed extensively in Metzger 2002. More generally, in public service interpreting, expectations from interpreters sometimes deviate markedly from ‘transparent’ neutrality.

As will be shown in Chapter 3, even technically, the need to make choices when Translating is incompatible with transparent neutrality as implicitly taught in school translation, and Sender-loyalty has concrete implications. In interactive meetings with interpreting, the main communication actors alternate as Senders and Receivers in the course of the exchange; since the Sender loyalty principle applies equally to each in turn, the Translator’s position is perhaps best summarized as rotating side-taking. This means that if decisions must be made in the course of Translation, the Translator is ‘biased’ in favour of the author’s or speaker’s interests as long as this is compatible with the Client’s brief and interests – and with applicable norms of professional ethics and practice.

Follow-up questions

1. Do translator’s personal moral or political positions affect interpretation process?
2. Speak about ‘transparent’ neutrality of interpreters
3. Name the actors of communication the Translator’s livelihood depends on

References

1. Nord, C. (1997d): "Text analysis in Translation by Christiane Nord"
2. Gerver, David & H. Wallace Sinaiko (eds). 1978. Language Interpretation and Communication. New York and London: Plenum Press.