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**Silvana E. Carr, Roda Roberts, Aideen Dufour, and Dini Steyn (eds.): *The Critical Link: Interpreters in the Community. Papers from the First International Conference on Interpreting in Legal, Health, and Social Service Settings (Geneva Park, Canada, June 1-4, 1995). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1997***

### **Abstract**

As the proceedings of the 1995 Toronto conference on community interpreting may be taken as representative of the state of the art in the field, this review article attempts to put research on community interpreting into perspective.

### **1. Introduction**

Practitioners and scholars alike seem to agree that interpreting occurs “whenever a message originating orally in one language is reformulated and retransmitted orally in a second language”, to quote Anderson (1978:218)<sup>1</sup>. Though this activity seems as ancient as language itself, general professionalization did not evolve until after the Second World War. In view of this recent emergence of interpreting as a profession, it

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<sup>1</sup> According to Isham (1995:136), it is regrettable that many practitioners, teachers, and researchers remain unconvinced that signed-language interpreting shares essential features with “normal” types of interpreting because they fail to see that manual languages are true languages. Anderson’s (1978:218) definition may be symptomatic of this attitude. Though an important discussion, it will not concern us here: I take it to be self-evident that interpreting occurs between *all* kinds of languages, including signed ones.

is hardly surprising that research in the field is also rather new. In the 1950s a few teachers and practitioners of conference interpreting (eg Herbert 1952) began to write about their experiences. In the 1960s the first research projects were initiated by a few psychologists and psycholinguists (eg Barik 1969), and in the late 1960s and early 1970s more people, especially practitioners (eg Seleskovitch 1975), became interested in doing research (see also Gile 1994).

Though admittedly still in its initial stages of scientific development (eg Gile 1995:25 and Shlesinger 1995:8), interpreting research is now establishing itself as a discipline in its own right. Thus, for instance, a couple of international research journals have been established (*The Interpreters' Newsletter* in 1989 and *Interpreting* in 1996), and four international conferences on interpreting have been convened: Venice 1977, Trieste 1986, Turku 1994, and Toronto 1995. Whereas the conferences in Venice, Trieste, and Turku dealt almost exclusively with conference interpreting, the conference in Toronto was unique in its focus on community interpreting. For this reason and in view of the paucity of literature on community interpreting, the book under review, which contains the proceedings of the Toronto conference, certainly deserves some special attention. Assuming that this book may be taken as representative of the state of the art in the field, I shall now attempt to put research on community interpreting into perspective.

## 2. Non-conference interpreting

Interpreting may be divided into two main types according to the setting: conference and non-conference interpreting. Non-conference interpreting may then be divided into subtypes, as shown by table 1.

Table 1: Types of non-conference interpreting

Business (liaison, escort)		
Community (public service, cultural)	Legal	Court
		Police
		Other
	Health	
Social		

Considerable terminological confusion persists regarding non-conference interpreting. Sometimes liaison interpreting is used as the generic term (eg Gentile & Ozolins & Vasilakakos 1996), but liaison interpreting may also be reserved for interpreting in business situations (eg Roberts p. 8). Terms like dialogue<sup>2</sup>, *ad hoc*, and three-cornered interpreting have also been suggested (cf Gentile & Ozolins & Vasilakakos 1996:17). But, as far as I know, neither of these terms is generally accepted. Consequently, in the following, I shall simply refer to interpreting in settings other than conferences and supranational organizations as non-conference interpreting.

Compared with conference interpreting, non-conference interpreting has at least four characteristics: (1) A conference interpreter may work in international settings with large audiences; a non-conference interpreter typically works in national settings with few people present. (2) Conference interpreting is often characterized by interpreter isolation, typically when interpreters work in booths; non-conference interpreting is characterized by interpreter integration<sup>3</sup>. (3) A conference interpreter usually works in one language direction only; a non-conference interpreter is typically required to work in two directions. (4) A lot of conference interpreting is simultaneous, at least as far as the EU is concerned<sup>4</sup>; in non-conference interpreting the consecutive mode is more usual, though whispered simultaneous interpreting (*chuchotage*) may also be employed (eg Longley 1984:180).

Non-conference interpreters probably outnumber their conference colleagues (cf Parnell 1989:253), but their work is not so well-known and it is much less prestigious (eg Mikkelsen 1996:125). Non-conference interpreters are rarely organized in professional associations - *à la* AIIC<sup>5</sup> - and seldom enjoy any official status (except, perhaps, as court interpreters - see section 2.2), few of them have received any formal training, and few do interpreting on a full-time basis (eg Mikkelsen 1996:125). Furthermore, many non-conference interpreters act as volunteers and may not even be paid.

<sup>2</sup> In Denmark, following a Scandinavian tradition (cf Wadensjö 1993:101), non-conference interpreting is referred to as *dialogtolkning* (dialogue interpreting).

<sup>3</sup> The isolation/integration distinction was also made by Anderson (1978:222).

<sup>4</sup> According to Baaring (1992:79), 95% of EU interpreting is simultaneous.

<sup>5</sup> The foundation of AIIC (*Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence*) in 1953 was an important milestone in the professionalization of conference interpreting.

## 2.1. Business interpreting

Non-conference interpreting may be divided into business interpreting and community interpreting. As community interpreting is the topic of the book under review, suffice it to say that business interpreting<sup>6</sup> occurs when interpreters aid business negotiations or accompany visitors or diplomats on business trips (sometimes also referred to as liaison or escort interpreting).

## 2.2. Community interpreting

Community interpreting is often defined as interpreting between a representative of public services (or agencies), on the one hand, and a member of an ethnic community (or minority), on the other (see for instance Longley 1984:178, Shackman 1984:3, Mikkelson 1996:126). The public services in question are typically legal, health, or social services (see for instance the title of the volume under review). Members of ethnic communities may be immigrants, refugees, or indigenous populations<sup>7</sup>.

Apparently, in the early 1980s, the term community interpreter was coined by an informal committee set up by the Institute of Linguists in London, England (Longley 1984:178). However, it is likely that the term was already known before 1980. Thus, for instance, Cheshier (p. 278) explains: “In Australia, the term community interpreter, and less frequently community translator, came into use at the same time as such phrases as ethnic communities, community health centres, and community development, in line with the political changes of the late sixties and early seventies”.

Unfortunately, the concept of community interpreting is not so well-defined as it would appear. First and foremost, there is no consensus regarding the status of legal interpreting. Contrary to the above definition (.. in legal, health, or social service settings), a distinction is sometimes made between legal interpreting and other kinds of community inter-

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<sup>6</sup> Presumably, high-level business interpreters tend to be trained conference interpreters.

<sup>7</sup> It is often emphasized that this kind of interpreting by definition involves an interlocutor who is a *resident* of the community (Mikkelson 1996:126). Thus, strictly speaking, interpreting in legal, health, or social settings for *tourists* cannot be regarded as community interpreting. However, I see no reason why tourist interpreting in these settings should not share essential characteristics with community interpreting.

preting. Thus, for instance, Shlesinger (1991) quite clearly distinguishes between community interpreting and court interpreting, Bowen & Bowen (1990) contains separate sections on court and community interpreting, and a workshop at the 1994 Turku conference (see section 3.) bore the headline of “Quality in Media, *Community*, *Court* Interpreting” (emphasis added). However, in view of its title, it is hardly surprising that most authors in the present volume do not make this distinction; only Pöchhacker (p. 218) uses the term community interpreting in its narrower sense (ie as distinct from legal interpreting).

The tendency to distinguish between legal interpreting and other kinds of community interpreting seems to be particularly strong in North America (eg Roberts p. 9). Schweda Nicholson (1994b:80) links this tendency with the passage of the Court Interpreters Act in 1978, when a lot of attention was drawn to this kind of interpreting. In line with this Mikkelsen (1996:126) even argues that it is “one manifestation of the ongoing effort in the United States to professionalize court interpreting and distance it from other types of community interpreting”.

Another problem in connection with the term community interpreting is that it is not even generally accepted. In Britain, for instance, the Institute of Linguists in London (which coined it) has recently abandoned the term because there was a tendency to confuse it with interpreting for the European Community (Corsellis p. 80). The Institute now favours the term public service interpreting. In Canada, the London Cultural Interpretation Service appears to prefer the term cultural interpreting (Garber & Mauffette-Leenders). Australians apparently no longer find the concept of community interpreting useful and have stopped using it, according to Gentile (p. 117). Gentile himself endorses this tendency as, in his opinion, the concept of community interpreting is not only ill-defined and therefore useless, its continued use will also have “a number of deleterious effects on the professional development” because it will perpetuate its “cinderella” image (Gentile p. 117), by which he means that practitioners are generally looked upon as second-rate interpreters. Be that as it may; in this article, I shall follow the use of the book under review and shall refer to interpreting in legal, health, and social settings as community interpreting.

Compared with conference interpreting and other kinds of non-conference interpreting (see above regarding general characteristics of

non-conference interpreting), **community interpreting** is characterized by at least two features (cf Shackman 1984:18f, Schweda Nicholson 1994a:128, Gentile & Ozolins & Vasilakakos 1996:18, Gentile p. 112, Benmaman p. 184). (1) In non-community interpreting, it may be difficult to say who represents the majority culture; in community interpreting, one interlocutor always represents the majority culture and the other the minority culture. (2) In non-community interpreting, interlocutors often meet, so to speak, on equal terms; in community interpreting, the member of the majority culture is in control. Thus, in other situations, interlocutors may share a professional background (eg scientists at a conference, businessmen negotiating) and their language levels are comparable; in community interpreting, the member of the majority culture has some official status, often providing some sort of “service” (eg as a judge, doctor, or social worker) and tends to speak a formal, professional language whereas the member of the minority culture acts on his own behalf (eg as a defendant, patient, or refugee) and tends to speak an informal, everyday language.

As a consequence of this cultural diversity and asymmetrical power relationship with its potential for misunderstandings and lack of communication, the community interpreter’s job is perhaps more complicated than that of other interpreters (eg Schweda Nicholson 1994a: 128). However, as pointed out by Gentile (p. 113), this well-known complexity must not lead us to think that community interpreting is basically *different* from other types of interpreting, at least not in the sense that it requires a different set of standards (cf Anderson’s (1978: 218) definition in section 1.).

Legal interpreting is given a special status within community interpreting. According to Benmaman (p. 181), it “refers to all situations in the legal domain in which interpreter services are performed”. This kind of interpreting includes court interpreting, police interpreting (eg interviews, interrogations), and other legal interpreting (eg lawyer/client conferences).

I shall now discuss three characteristics of **legal interpreting**. (1) The use of other community interpreters is generally unregulated; the use of legal interpreters, especially in court, is often regulated by law. In Denmark for instance it is stipulated by law that an authorized interpreter must, if possible, assist court interrogations of non-Danish speakers (see also Schweda Nicholson & Martinsen p. 260). (2) Other kinds

of community interpreters remain largely unmonitored - Australia being an outstanding exception with extensive and wide-ranging accreditation procedures (eg Bell and Lascar); legal interpreters, especially in court, are mostly subject to some official approval. Danish police and court interpreters must be approved by the National Commissioner of the Danish Police (*Rigspolitichefen*)<sup>8</sup>. (3) In other kinds of community interpreting, codes of ethics are often unwritten and rarely published; in legal interpreting there is often an official list of ethical rules. In Denmark a letter of instructions to all interpreters approved by the National Commissioner was published in 1994. According to Schweda Nicholson & Martinsen (p. 264) the guidelines laid down by this letter are similar to those of many codes of ethics for legal interpreting throughout the world.

### 3. Research on non-conference interpreting

As mentioned in the introduction, four international conferences on interpreting have taken place. In order to explore the extent of research on non-conference interpreting prior to the Toronto conference, I shall briefly examine each of the previous conferences, assuming that these may function as representatives of current research efforts.

The first international conference ever to focus on interpreting was a NATO symposium entitled “Language Interpretation and Communication”, which took place in 1977 in Venice, Italy (for proceedings, see Gerver & Sinaiko 1978). This conference was a landmark conference as it provided a unique opportunity for practising interpreters and researchers to meet and discuss research issues (eg Gile 1995:15). Though most of the participants of the Venice conference were involved in conference interpreting (practice and/or research), interpreting in other settings also received some attention. Thus, for instance, Lang (1978) analyzed the interaction between some court interpreters, which he called liaison interpreters, and their clients in New Guinea; Harris & Sherwood (1978) discussed “natural translation” (or rather natural *interpreting*, since it is oral), focussing on the individual case histories of immigrant children in Canada; and Anderson (1978)

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<sup>8</sup> Actually, as noted by Madsen (1997:28), the Danish National Commissioner has no power of approval over *court* interpreters, only police interpreters. However, in practice, court interpreters are appointed by the courts on the basis of the official list of police interpreters.

compared the work of “casual” interpreters with those of conference interpreters.

Under the headline of “The Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Teaching Conference Interpretation”, the second international conference on interpreting was convened in Trieste, Italy, in 1986, hosted by the *Scuola Superiore di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori* of the University of Trieste (for proceedings see Gran & Dodds 1989). Again the aim was to allow practitioners and researchers to meet and discuss, but this time the focus was on teaching-related issues. Just as in Venice, the vast majority of participants were involved in conference interpreting, though a few of them dealt with non-conference interpreting: Parnell (1989) argued that liaison interpreting (meaning business interpreting) may be used as a method of language instruction; and Gentile (1989) discussed interpreting in Australia (ie community interpreting).

The third international conference on interpreting was held in Turku, Finland, in 1994 (for proceedings see Gambier & Gile & Taylor 1997). Whereas the Trieste conference had focussed on teaching aspects, in Turku the emphasis was again on research. Furthermore, the scope of interpreting research seemed to have broadened somewhat, as non-conference interpreting now enjoyed a slightly more visible position: one workshop dealt specifically with non-conference interpreting (“Quality in Media, Community, Court Interpreting”), and two posters dealt with liaison interpreting, two with dialogue interpreting, one with court interpreting, and one with business interpreting.

However, in spite of the apparent broadening of scope at the Turku conference, research in the field is still almost completely dominated by conference interpreting. Consequently, if interpreting research in general is still in its initial stages of scientific development, research on non-conference interpreting is even more so. It is therefore no exaggeration to say that the international conference on interpreting in 1995 in Toronto was a much-needed opportunity for the exploration of non-conference interpreting. The rest of this article is a review of the proceedings of this conference.



## 4. Review

The 22 papers in the volume under review are divided into six sections. Not to put too fine a point on it, some of these headlines are unhelpful and confusing: Roberts' paper is the only one in the section of **“Overview of Community interpreting”**, but her paper is not very different from other papers which also discuss general issues (eg Gentile). The section of **“Roles of the Community Interpreter”** contains two papers (Fenton and Wadensjö), but other papers (eg Englund Dimitrova, Fowler, and Hale) might equally have qualified for this section. The section headline **“Training in Community Interpreting”** is less confusing, as its papers (Mikkelson & Mintz, Penney & Sammons, and Corsellis) undoubtedly concentrate on training issues. However, other papers also seem to be steered by training considerations (eg Benmaman). The section of **“Standards, Evaluation, Accreditation”** contains papers (Bell, Gentile, Lascar, and Garber & Mauffette-Leenders) which, in different ways, discuss some or all of these issues, but so do other papers in the volume (eg Schweda Nicholson & Martinsen). The section headline **“Issues in Community Interpreting”** is too vague to be helpful and its papers (Englund Dimitrova, Fortier, Benmaman, Fowler, and Hale) might just as well have been categorized under other headings in the volume. Similarly, as previous sections also contain practice-oriented papers, it renders no useful information to have a separate section entitled **“Community Interpreting in Practice”** (Pöchhacker, Bullock & Harris, Michael & Cocchini, Thomas, Schweda Nicholson & Martinsen, Carr, and Chesher).

Instead of the above section headlines, the editors might have chosen simply to divide the papers into these three categories: (1) general issues, (2) legal settings, (3) health settings. As I see it, this would have been less confusing and more helpful for readers with special interests.

### 4.1. Summary

The volume contains a foreword by **Harris**, the University of Ottawa, Canada. The conference is described as “an historic event in the evolution of professional interpreting” (p. 1) and its proceedings are characterized as “an unprecedented panorama and cross-section of what is going on at this time in an ebullient field” (p. 2). I tend to agree with these observations. Though it would have been appropriate in view of

the above-mentioned terminological confusion regarding non-conference interpreting (section 2.), the foreword does not delimit or explain the scope of the volume. Nor does it offer any introduction to the ensuing papers or explain their partition into sections, which would have been helpful and interesting.

In the following, individual papers will be categorized as suggested above: general issues (eleven papers), legal settings (seven papers), and health settings (four papers).

### *General issues*

**Roberts** (pp. 7-26), the University of Ottawa, Canada, writes a general paper on community interpreting as a profession. The paper contains many interesting reflections of general interest and therefore deserves more attention than some of the ensuing papers. Roberts discusses the scope of community interpreting, showing how the concept is far from well-defined. Interpreter roles are discussed according to five overlapping “philosophical approaches” (pp. 10ff): (1) active participant in communication event, (2) assistant or service provider, (3) cultural broker, (4) advocate for an “underprivileged” client, and (5) conciliator in a conflict. Roberts is probably right in her assumption that, compared with conference interpreters, community interpreters are more often allowed - or even expected - to assume all or some of these roles. However, in my opinion, it is still debatable whether such roles, especially those of advocate and conciliator, are actually appropriate. As I see it, it should be regarded as highly unprofessional if interpreters take on the duties of other professionals, for instance lawyers and social workers (cf Colin & Morris 1996:149 and summary of Corsellis’ paper below). Roberts then points out that very little training is available, and what is available is usually non-academic and unsystematic (p. 16). Interestingly, Roberts links the lack of proper training with employment conditions. Thus, for instance, “it is believed that community interpreters do not earn enough to warrant their following a long and serious programme of study” (p. 19). Roberts finishes by listing five initiatives necessary for the professionalization of community interpreting: (1) clarification of the interpreter’s roles, (2) training of professionals working with interpreters (ie service providers in the community), (3) training of interpreters, (4) training of trainers, and (5) introduction of accredita-

tion procedures (as in Canada and Australia). In their different ways, the ensuing papers might be seen as first steps towards these initiatives.

**Penney & Sammons** (pp. 65-76) describe in some detail the programme for translators and interpreters offered at their college, the Nunavut Arctic College, Canada. It is particularly interesting to read about the specialized course on medical interpreting, which faces some major challenges. One important challenge is the lack of proper medical terminology in Inuktitut, the designated working language of the Nunavut government. To meet this challenge, the course on medical interpreting provides terminology development in addition to interpreting training and an introduction into topics like anatomy and physiology. Interestingly, such terminology development may even lead to an attempt to change widely used, but incorrect terms. Thus, for instance, instead of the widely used Inuktitut word for cancer, which literally means “something which cannot be cured” (p. 73), a more correct term meaning “the cells have become abnormal” (p. 75) was developed. Another important challenge is the cultural gap between English-speaking doctors and nurses, who are “culturally ignorant” (p. 74), and their Inuktitut-speaking patients. The authors’ answer to this challenge appears sensible: “We emphasize the importance of accurate interpretation but not to the exclusion of necessary sensitivity” (p. 74) - ie a compromise between the roles of cultural brokerage and objectivity.

**Corsellis** (pp. 77-89), the Institute of Linguists, London, England, also writes about training, but her main concern is the training of users, namely public service personnel. The point seems to be that interpreters are being pressurized into doing “everything” *à la* Mary Poppins (p. 81), including what service providers carry out in “normal” situations. Apparently, the interpreter’s role should be confined to the “transfer of the meaning of the spoken word between languages” (p. 84), and the public service personnel must become more active and learn to solve cultural problems themselves. Corsellis’ point is certainly a valid one and her paper addresses an essential problem in community interpreting. However, the description of the interpreter’s roles (*à la* Mary Poppins vs linguistic transfer) is too simplistic to be useful (cf the papers by Wadensjö and Hale, summarized below), and, without a proper understanding of the role of the interpreter, I fear we cannot begin to train interpreters - let alone users.

**Bell** (pp. 93-108) represents the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI), Australia. In a highly informative paper, she describes the history and workings of NAATI, founded in 1977. Thanks to NAATI, national standards and accreditation procedures now apply, the profession has generally been promoted, and a national register is being planned. According to several other authors - eg Roberts (p. 16, quoting J. Blewett) - Australia claims to be the world leader regarding the provision, regulation, and training of community interpreters and translators. Bell's paper leaves us in no doubt as to the truth of this claim.

**Gentile** (pp. 109-118), the Deakin University, Australia, challenges the concept of community interpreting and suggests that it should be abandoned and simply referred to as interpreting - as is already the practice in Australia (p. 117). As also mentioned in section 2.2, Gentile is, of course, quite right that the concept of community interpreting is both ill-defined and has certain negative connotations. However, I fail to see that this should be reason enough to abandon the *term*: after all, what's in a name? In my opinion (though, admittedly, I am not a native speaker of English nor a resident of Australia), for now it would be useful to ignore the terminological confusion and potential prejudices in order to concentrate on matters of substance, such as training and research.

**Lascar** (pp. 119-130), the University of Western Sydney, Australia, describes a research project on alternative means of accreditation carried out by the Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT) for the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs (DIEA). Though she does not say so, I assume that Lascar herself was involved in this project. Apparently, the starting point was to find ways for the DIEA "to deal equitably" (p. 120) with translators and interpreters without NAATI accreditation (see the summary of Bell's paper above). In order to do that, the situation in Australia as well as abroad was surveyed, and practitioners, teachers, and users were consulted. The paper contains some useful information about an important project, but it would have been more interesting if Lascar had put some of the findings into perspective.

**Garber & Mauffette-Leenders** (pp. 131-143), the London Cultural Interpretation Service (LCIS), Canada, employ so-called cultural interpreters. Though no definition is offered, I assume that cultural interpret-

ing is synonymous with community interpreting, as defined in section 2.2. The authors describe a pilot project on obtaining feedback from their non-English speaking clients by means of questionnaires. This is the first time that the LCIS obtains feedback “from the party for whom the service was created in the first place” (p.132). In spite of the authors’ initial idea that equality would be best served if all clients (English speaking as well as non-English speaking clients) were given identical questionnaires, one conclusion is that questionnaires should be adjusted to the different needs of clients (p. 136); this raises a host of interesting questions for further research, I should think. As far as I know, no other study has examined quality from the viewpoint of the member of the minority culture (here the non-English speaking client).

**Pöchhacker** (pp. 215-225), the University of Vienna, Austria, presents a wealth of thoroughly-researched information about the practice and perspectives of community interpreting (defined without legal interpreting) in Austria. A prominent scholar within conference interpreting, Pöchhacker has not previously been involved in this type of research. But now he offers to make use of his position in the “First World” of interpreting to gather information about and draw attention to the “Third World” of interpreting (p. 215). Some community interpreters may find this and other references to the underdevelopment of their field offensive. However, in terms of prestige, professional qualifications, and amount of research, there can be no doubt that Pöchhacker’s description is accurate (cf sections 2. and 3.). In this light, it is perhaps particularly important to note that one result of Pöchhacker’s study is a suggestion that dialogue interpreting (ie non-conference interpreting as defined in section 2.) could be taught within the framework of the conference interpreting programme at the University of Vienna (p. 224).

In their paper (pp. 227-248), **Bullock**, the Carleton Board of Education, and **Harris**, the University of Ottawa, Canada, describe how groups of child interpreters, so-called Ambassadors’ Clubs, have been organized in some elementary schools. Within the boundaries of their schools, these children act as interpreters in non-confidential matters between English and various immigrant/refugee languages. The authors emphasize that the scheme is more than a service to the school: it is also a source of personal development and socialization to the children (p. 234). According to the authors, there is already sufficient proof

of children's innate skills as interpreters/translators (cf Harris & Sherwood's (1978) paper on "natural translation", mentioned in section 3.). As the children seem to enjoy and benefit from their work, one cannot but sympathize with the aims of the scheme. However, personally I feel that even in a school setting and even if the matter is non-confidential children should not be given the adult responsibility of interpreting. Furthermore, if no interpreting training is available (and apparently it is not), how do we know that these young interpreters can cope with the inevitable strain of the job?

As a UN Military Observer in war-torn former Yugoslavia, Major **Thomas** (pp. 249-257), Canada, writes about his use of community interpreters (as opposed to peace interpreters, a term which is not defined). As this is the only paper written by a user of interpreters and as one can imagine that these interpreters must have played a pivotal part in the rescue of lives, Thomas' paper is potentially intriguing. It is therefore unfortunate - though perhaps understandable from a user's point of view - that the paper contains few details about the interpreters' work. For instance, in the section entitled "Interpreter Techniques", I was rather disappointed merely to be referred to Thomas' own article in *Language International* (1995, 7:1).

**Chesher** (pp. 277-289), an employer of translators at a Health Department in Sydney, Australia, and a translator himself, gives us some of the historical and current background to translation and (community) interpreting in Australia. It is for instance interesting to learn that the success of community interpreting in Australia seems to be linked to the political changes of the late sixties and early seventies, when pluralism and multiculturalism began to dominate (p. 279). Chesher finishes his paper by questioning Australia's much acclaimed status as the world leader in the field of community interpreting, suggesting that the reality may not match the rhetoric (p. 289). However, in view of Bell's paper in the volume (summarized above), I find it hard to believe that Australia should actually be lacking behind other countries in this respect.

### *Legal settings*

**Fenton** (pp. 29-34), the Auckland Institute of Technology, New Zealand, writes an informed and thought-provoking paper on the role of the court interpreter in the adversarial courtroom. As evidence given

through an interpreter may be regarded as hearsay evidence (ie information not heard or experienced by the speaker him/herself), and as hearsay evidence is generally inadmissible under the law<sup>9</sup>, the use of interpreters has created an evidentiary problem. Citing an Australian case from 1960, which followed an English precedent from the 1950s, Fenton explains how the solution to this problem has traditionally been found in a narrowing down of the interpreter's role to that of a non-thinking, mechanical or electrical device, common metaphors being modems, conduit pipes, etc. However, as this traditional solution is both unrealistic and disrespectful to the interpreter, Fenton advocates that the interpreter should assume the role of an expert witness - a role prescription which would mark "the increased acceptance and understanding of the profession" (p. 33). Fenton is right, of course, that the traditional metaphor of translation machine is inadequate, and I agree that the interpreter's status could do with some upgrading. However, I find the suggested solution excessively complicated and potentially distortive of the interpreter's role, which, in my view, is fundamentally different from that of a witness (even an expert one): surely, the witness is there to *give evidence* whereas the interpreter is there to *aid* the communication of evidence and other matters. But perhaps it is wishful thinking to expect the law to accept such a distinction.

In an interactional, sociolinguistic framework, **Wadensjö** (pp. 35-52), the University of Linköping, Sweden, analyzes the questioning techniques, especially the use of recycled information, employed in an interpreter-mediated police interview in order to assess the effects on the interpreter's role. The overall result is that the interpreter's role is a combination of that of translating and that of coordinating others' talk (p. 51), which was also concluded in Wadensjö's (1992) PhD dissertation. More specifically, the paper shows how an interpreter may influence the success of the questioning techniques chosen by an interviewing police officer. In an interesting way, Wadensjö's paper documents how the traditional role prescription of a non-thinking device (cf the summary of Fenton's paper above) is oversimplistic and inadequate. Furthermore, her paper is one of the most thorough and well-founded

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<sup>9</sup> I assume that Fenton refers to Anglo-Saxon law. As a point of interest, I can mention that there is no rule under Danish law which renders hearsay evidence inadmissible (see for instance Hurwitz 1949:477ff and Gomard 1994:411).

papers in the volume. Its density and elaborate examples make it somewhat difficult to follow, though.

As members of a Court Advisory Committee in California, **Mikkelsen**, the Monterey Institute of International Studies, and **Mintz**, Consultant, USA, studied ways of increasing the quality and quantity of interpreters available to the California court system. In the course of this work, “it became apparent that the lack of training was at the root of all other problems” (p. 57). Based on the assumption that any instruction would be an improvement on the situation, the authors undertook to conduct various orientation workshops for working and aspiring court interpreters. These workshops are described in the current paper (pp. 55-63). Though it contains no discussion of certain key issues, eg ethics, it is a useful and instructive paper with many practical ideas, which must be of special interest to teachers, practitioners and users alike.

Emphasizing that court interpreting is just one form of legal interpreting, **Benmaman** (pp. 179-190), the University of Charleston, USA, argues that “the code of professional responsibility of the interpreter is the same in any legal setting” (p. 184). The paper also summarizes some well-known characteristics of community interpreting in general: two languages in both directions, wide discrepancy in the educational level of the interlocutors, and confusion and frustration felt by the interlocutors and interpreter alike. Finally, Benmaman suggests a list of core components for a training programme for “community legal interpreters” (p. 186). In a practical, didactic perspective, the paper contains many interesting points.

**Fowler** (pp. 191-200), the East Birmingham College, England, studies the role of the court interpreter, which she defines as “paragon *and* intruder” (paper headline; emphasis as in original). This is very much in line with Wadensjö’s conclusions (see summary above). One interesting observation is the apparent paradox that though many magistrates feel suspicious about the professionalism of court interpreters they also expect these interpreters to take full responsibility for the communication, including the rectification of breakdowns (p. 197). Some of Fowler’s information is based on direct observation in court as well as interviews with both magistrates and interpreters (p. 191). As empirical data on court interpreting are not easily obtained, Fowler’s method is both laudable and in accordance with sound research prin-



ciples. It is, however, regrettable that the reader is given no details about the collection of these data. But, as the paper touches on many essential issues within the field of court interpreting, it could probably give inspiration to many new research projects.

**Hale** (pp. 201-211), the University of Western Sydney, Australia, presents “the results of a major data based study” (p. 205) of court interpreting. However, again, the reader is deprived of essential information about the data, and this is even more unfortunate than in Fowler’s case as Hale’s paper contains interesting, but non-contextualized transcripts. Like other authors, Hale is concerned with the interpreter’s role and rejects the well-known metaphor of translation machine. Instead of striving towards the translation of literal meaning, she argues that interpreters should attempt to achieve pragmatic equivalence, ie equivalence of pragmatic meaning (as defined by House (1981:28), drawing on speech act theory). Hale then proceeds to discuss various examples of pragmatic failure and concludes “that the interpreting process is far from being the simple word matching exercise it is often believed to be, and that it is fraught with potential problems” (p. 211). Though this conclusion would be considered rather trivial by many practising court interpreters, its documentation, though non-contextualized in the paper, is certainly valuable.

As a 1995 Fulbright Scholar at the Aarhus School of Business, Denmark, **Schweda Nicholson**, the University of Delaware, USA, and her Aarhus colleague, **Martinsen**, investigated aspects of court interpreting in Denmark, gathering information for instance by means of interviews with two defence lawyers, one prosecutor, and one judge. To my knowledge, this paper (pp. 259-270) is the first to report on court interpreting in Denmark. In an informed way, the authors review interpreter-related laws and regulations as well as some issues in connection with authorization, roles, standards, languages, courtroom procedure, and future developments (some of this is cited in section 2.2). Some interesting differences between USA and Denmark are also pointed out, eg in connection with the method of record-keeping: verbatim in USA and non-verbatim in Denmark (pp. 267f).

*Health settings*

**Englund Dimitrova** (pp. 147-164), Stockholm University, Sweden, explores the interpreter's role in the interaction process. In an interactional, sociolinguistic framework (cf the summary of Wadensjö's paper above), the paper analyzes turntaking and feedback in some transcripts from two authentic doctor-patient interviews. Though the examples are sometimes difficult to follow because of their complexity, the paper is particularly interesting when Englund Dimitrova illustrates how the interpreter attempts to avoid simultaneous talk by interrupting and how non-verbal feedback can show that the interpreter is still listening. No doubt, the documentation of such aspects will prove helpful to practitioners and researchers alike.

**Fortier** (pp. 165-177), Resources for Cross Cultural Health Care, USA, examines so-called government mechanisms to promote the availability of bilingual services and interpreting in health care in USA. The paper is packed with information, including some intriguing insights into the American political system, especially the legislative process, but there is little of general interest as far as interpreting is concerned. In fact, this paper resembles a political report for internal use.

**Michael & Cocchini** (pp. 237-257) discuss the Community Interpreter Project (CIP) at their college, the Hunter College, USA. The CIP is an academic, fieldwork course in social science or sociology, during which bilingual students are trained as medical interpreters, work as hospital interpreters on a voluntary basis, and follow relevant seminars (eg on bilingualism and health care delivery). The aims of the course are to develop students' language skills and cultural awareness, enhance their positive self-image, and stimulate their interest in pursuing health and social service careers (p. 238). Indirectly the paper provides an interesting insight into the process of professionalization: the students, who have previous experience as informal interpreters for their own families, change dramatically when they learn to appreciate the value of a neutral, disengaged position. One tangible example of this is the change from the third-person address, which is typical of informal interpreting, to the first-person address (p. 239). Assuming that the CIP students are teenagers (or at least young people who have not decided on a career yet), one may object to the immaturity of these interpreters - as I did above in connection with Bullock & Harris' paper on child interpreters. However, firstly, these interpreters are not children, and,

secondly, which makes a great difference, they are trained. By any standards, as these students would act as interpreters for their own families anyway, it is probably much better to train them than not to do so. Another matter is that the CIP project could be criticized for offering unpaid volunteers where professionals are really needed. But perhaps it would be unrealistic to expect public hospitals in USA to pay for professional interpreters.

**Carr** (pp. 271-276), the Vancouver Community College, Canada, discusses a so-called three-tiered health care interpreter system, which consists of three groups of “interpreters” with varying degrees of training: (1) staff, (2) community volunteers, and (3) paid professionals (p. 272). Allegedly, once professional interpreters, the third group, have been used by health providers, this will be the preferred method (p. 276). As implemented in Vancouver, the system “is expected to facilitate communication between health care providers and non-English speaking patients in a timely and cost-efficient manner” (p. 276). As outlined in Carr’s paper, the idea seems realistic.

## 4.2. General comments

The proceedings of the conferences in Venice, Trieste, and Turku contain relatively few papers by North Americans and Australasians<sup>10</sup>. But, at least in terms of the authors’ geographical origin, the proceedings of the 1995 Toronto conference is different: out of 29 authors, 17 are North Americans (ten from Canada and seven from USA) and six are Australasians (five from Australia and one from New Zealand); other authors come from the UK (two), Sweden (two), Denmark (one), and Austria (one). This pattern may at least partly be explained by the fact that Canada, USA, Australia, and New Zealand are countries of immigration and with indigenous populations, which must have contributed to a greater awareness of community interpreting. In addition, the venue of the conference itself may also explain some of the overrepresentation of North America<sup>11</sup>. But then again it is probably logical that

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<sup>10</sup> For instance, in the proceedings of the 1986 conference in Trieste (Gran & Dodds 1989), out of 42 authors, only five are North Americans (one from Canada and four from USA) and one is Australian.

<sup>11</sup> In comparison, I can mention that the Trieste conference resulted in 13 papers by authors from Italy, the host country.

the first international conference on community interpreting was to be organized in a country like Canada.

It is probably also significant that two of the most thorough and well-founded contributions in the volume have Swedish origins, namely the papers by Wadensjö and Englund Dimitrova. Compared with other countries, where scholars tend to concentrate on conference interpreting, Sweden is already developing a tradition for research on community interpreting - or dialogue interpreting, as it is usually called (eg Wadensjö 1993:101) - often in an interactional, sociolinguistic framework. According to Wande (1994:112), Linköping University (eg Wadensjö 1992) has been in a leading position, but projects are also conducted at Stockholm University (eg by Birgitta Englund Dimitrova).

As authors are merely introduced by means of affiliation and country of origin, readers are mostly left to conjectures regarding their backgrounds and starting points. But I assume that most authors are involved in community interpreting as teachers and/or practitioners - Thomas being a notable exception as a user - and that few of them engage in actual research. If this is so, it is hardly surprising that relatively few of the papers report on the authors' own research projects. As I see it, a third of the papers could be said to reflect empirical research (with collection and analysis of some sort of data); another third contain theoretical reflections which may be deemed to be research-related; and, as far as I can see, the last third of the papers draw mainly on their authors' own experiences as practitioners and/or teachers. This practical orientation is also acknowledged by Harris (p. 2) in the foreword: "the biggest service rendered by the conference was to bring workers from scattered areas together for the first time in a live international exchange of information and prospects". It is probably fair to say that a practical orientation is not unusual in proceedings from conferences on interpreting.

However, it is curious that few authors apparently found anything of interest in the current literature on interpreting - at least if one is to judge from the 16 pages of works cited, which contain few references to well-known and prominent interpreting scholars. Thus, for instance, there is no reference to the work by Daniel Gile, who is *the* most productive author in the field according to Pöchhacker's (1995:49) ranking of the 25 most productive authors. In fact, from this ranking, only Nancy Schweda Nicholson, Elena de Jongh, and Ruth Morris are cited

in the book under review - and they are active within community interpreting. Instead, the list of works cited contains references to other scholars within non-conference interpreting as well as scholars within (I mention at random:) translation theory, general linguistics, bilingualism, sociolinguistics, sociology, psychology, medicine, law, and politics.

The lack of references to current interpreting research may be explained, at least partly, by the fact that this research is primarily concerned with conference interpreting and therefore may be seen to focus on issues less relevant for community interpreting. Thus, for instance, whereas scholars within conference interpreting seem very interested in conducting process-oriented studies, perhaps scholars within community interpreting are more inclined towards sociological studies (cf the many papers on interpreter roles in the volume under review).

Another explanation for the lack of references to current interpreting research in the volume under review may be found in the fact that research on community interpreting is very much in the initial stages of development, where scholars are naturally preoccupied with rather existential issues, eg the definition of their object of study. In other words, research on community interpreting probably needs to come to grips with essentials before it is ready to take into account the work of other interpreting scholars.

## **5. Conclusion**

To sum up, if the proceedings from the 1995 Toronto conference are to be taken as representative of current research on community interpreting, what then is the state of the art? Admittedly, even after this landmark conference in Toronto, the fact is that many aspects of community interpreting remain largely unexplored from an empirical point of view. However, the volume under review is clearly the result of a commendable and unprecedented exchange of information and ideas; and it may give inspiration to a host of new research initiatives, especially on roles and ethics. In other words, the volume is an excellent first step towards setting an agenda for a budding research field.

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