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Meta-discourse as a Source for Exploring the Professional Image(s) of Conference Interpreters

Abstract

Simultaneous conference interpreters, like all other professionals, operate with a 'professional identity' that shapes, and is shaped, by the way a variety of actors and institutions inside and outside the field of activity see and describe the profession(al). Departing from the assumption that the professional image of conference interpreters is largely (meta-)discursive in nature, this paper analyzes how various actors and institutions depict conference interpreting and interpreters in their discourses, whether the images propagated converge or diverge from each other, and what the divergences may imply for the profession and the professional.

1.   Introduction

Simultaneous conference interpreters, like all other professionals, operate with a 'professional identity' that shapes, and is shaped, by the way a variety of actors and institutions inside and outside the field of activity see and describe the profession(al). In that sense, the professional identity of conference interpreters is largely a professional image that is (meta-)discursive in nature.

As with any meta-discursive representation, the way various actors and institutions depict the ideal professional does not constitute a neutral description of intrinsic professional features but presents a selected and hierarchised set of norms which, according to Toury (1995: 55), convert the general values or ideas shared by a community into performance instructions that specify what is prescribed and forbidden as well as what is tolerated and permitted.

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Meta-discursive (re)presentations thus both empower professionals, by giving them the status of experts who possess a certain knowledge base and social standing, yet at the same time, they constrain them by hierarchising and privileging some professional features and behaviors over others. In that sense, the Bourdieu terms 'economic' and 'symbolic power' are very much present and perceptible in the meta-discursive representations of the conference interpreting profession and the professional.

Since any meta-discourse will present a selected and hierarchised set of norms, certain norms are likely to be more prevalent than others in the general meta-discursive representation of a profession. Despite the tendency towards rationalization and purification in meta-discourse (Barthes 1970), opposition and contradiction always remain possible, first of all, because the views and interests of the actors and institutions directly or indirectly involved in the (re)production of the discourse tend to diverge from each other and, secondly, because the internal dynamics and dynamism of language tend to engender multiple interpretations and thereby render a single monolithic and authoritative representation of an object impossible.

In this paper, I will explore the meta-discursive (re)presentation of simultaneous conference interpreters and interpreting (SI) to gain an insight into the professional image of conference interpreters. I will try to do so by focusing on the general image of the profession(al) as verbalised by various actors and institutions, with an eye to identifying what is commonly expected and demanded of simultaneous interpreting and interpreters. Whilst doing this, I aim to examine the extent to which the images projected by different actors and institutions converge and diverge; that is, to see whether expectations and demands of SI are common or varied[1].

In exploring the professional image of conference interpreters, I will draw on the discourse of professional organizations, general reference books (such as dictionaries and encyclopediae), academic literature, printed and electronic media in Turkey (including both the media's own representation of SI and interpreters' self-representations in the media),

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1   The corpus analyzed in this paper is largely taken from Diriker 2004.

and a book by a practicing conference interpreter in Turkey, which is addressed to the general public.

As the list suggests, the focus here is on already existing sources of discourse, and no attempt is made to generate new discourses on SI, such as by means of interviews, the method foegrounded in an on-going project to explore the professional self-image of translators and interpreters in Israel (see Shlesinger/Sela-Sheffy 2008, Sela-Sheffy 2008). Although my main aim here is to deal with a wide range of discourses, I could not be said to have exhausted all possible sources of discourses. But then, my objective is not to attempt the impossible task of covering everything that has been said and written about SI, but to present a variety of institutional and individual positions on SI in the hope of gaining an insight into the kinds of professional images they present and the demands they make of simultaneous interpreters and interpreting.

2. Discourse on SI

Looking at the meta-discourse on SI it seems there is a clear difference between the ways outsiders (i.e., non-interpreters) and insiders (i.e., interpreters) depict conference interpreting and interpreters. According to the material analyzed here, outsiders tend to adopt and propagate the professional image of interpreters as experts who can faithfully render the words of a speaker into another language, while insiders present themselves as experts who can render the meanings intended by the speakers. Thus, while 'faithfulness to the original word' characterizes the discourse of outsiders, 'faithfulness to the original meaning' characterizes the discourse of insiders. In what follows, I will attempt to show this difference in the discourse of insiders and outsiders.

2.1. Dictionaries

As we all know, dictionaries provide the most conventional and de-contextualized definitions on any subject matter. Dictionary definitions are short, succinct and written by language experts (i.e., outsiders) rather than area specialists (i.e., insiders).

Here are two consecutive entries on "interpretation" and "interpreting" in *A Student's Dictionary of Language and Linguistics*:

Interpretation: *assigning a meaning* to something you hear or read.

> **Interpreting**: the art of listening to a person speaking in one language and then immediately after (or even simultaneously) *producing a spoken equivalent* in a different language (Trask 1997: 116, my emphasis).

According to the dictionary definitions here, while "interpretation" in general is marked by the *involvement* of the one who does the interpretation, "interpreting", which is used to define interlingual mediation, refers to a more *objective* process, where the person doing the interpretation produces *spoken equivalents* between languages.

Delineating interlingual interpreting from other forms of "interpretation" is not an uncommon approach at all. Here is an entry on "(to) interpret" in *The Collins Cobuild Dictionary of English Language*:

> **interpret:** 1. if you **interpret** what someone says or does in a particular way, *you decide that this is its meaning or significance.*

> 2. if you **interpret** a novel, dream, result, etc., *you give an explanation of what it means.*

> 3. if you **interpret** a work of art such as a piece of music, a play, a dance, etc., *you perform it in a particular way, especially a way that shows your feelings about it.*

> 4. if you **interpret** what someone is saying, *you translate it immediately into another language, so that speakers of that language can understand* (Sinclair 1987: 763, my emphasis).

As in the first example, except for interlingual interpreting referred to in item 4, all forms of interpreting are defined as involving the active engagement of the person who is interpreting (i.e., the interpreter). In all three definitions, the interpreter becomes involved in shaping the object of interpretation such as dreams, results, meanings of utterances and actions, a piece of music, play, dance, etc. The definition of interlingual interpreting is the only one where the interpreting process is assumed to proceed independent of the interpreter's involvement and is presented as an objective and impersonal act of *making somebody else's words understood*.

The difference between interlingual and other forms of interpreting is even more marked in the definition of the "interpreter" in the same dictionary:

> **interpreter:** 1. a person who *repeats* what someone else is saying by translating it immediately into another language so that other people can understand it.
>
> 2. a person who explains the meaning or significance of something.
>
> 3. a person who performs a work of art in a particular way, especially a way that shows the performer's feelings about it (Sinclair 1987: 764, my emphasis).

Clearly, while all other "interpreters" bring in their subjectivity to the interpretation process (by explaining the meaning or significance of something or performing a work of art in a way that shows their feelings), the interlingual interpreter is defined as one who *repeats* what a speaker says in another language.

2.2. Encyclopediae

Moving on to encyclopediae, the tendency within dictionaries to depict interpreting as an *objective* transfer between languages seems to be largely replicated, but with one important shift in emphasis: while the dictionaries I have examined tend to foreground 'faithfulness to the original word', by stating interpreters produce 'spoken equivalents' or 'repeat what speakers say in another language', encyclopedia entries seem to underline the importance of 'rendering the meaning' intended by the speakers.

Given that dictionaries and encyclopediae are both general reference books, the shift in emphasis is quite striking and is possibly attributable to the fact that the encyclopedia entry surveyed in this study is written by a professional interpreter (i.e., an insider) which is not the case with the dictionaries covered. Roda Roberts' entry in *The Encyclopedia of Language and Literature* reads:

> The goal of conference interpretation, as well as of escort and community interpretation is a relatively *smooth presentation of the cognitive content of the message*, with the interpreter extracting the ideas from the oral discourse and reproducing them in an appropriate form and register in the target language (Roberts 1994: 1732, my emphasis).

In this depiction, the goal of interpreting is defined as the "smooth presentation of the cognitive content of the message". Even though transferring the cognitive content of a message seems like a common objec-

tive for all types of interpreting, this view is later challenged by the author, who differentiates court interpreting from conference interpreting, and associates the transfer of the cognitive message with conference interpreting alone:

> The goal of legal interpretation, especially in a courtroom situation, includes the transfer of features such as the speaker's hesitation, incomplete statements, redundancy, etc. because judges, lawyers and juries base their decision about a witness's credibility not only on what she/he says but also on how she/he says it (Roberts 1994: 1732).

Thus, while court interpreting is described as requiring the transfer of *how* people say what they say (including flaws such as incomplete statements, etc.), conference interpreting is depicted as requiring the *smooth* transfer of *what* people say rather than *how* people say it.

In a similar vein, Roberts (Roberts 1994: 1732) distinguishes between (oral) interpretation and (written) translation, arguing that translation requires "fidelity to the author's stated text" (i.e., the *how*) whereas oral interpretation primarily requires "fidelity to the speaker's communicative intent" (i.e., the *what*). Thus, conference interpreting is presented as the only type of interpretation and translation in which ‚rendering the meaning of the original utterance' constitutes the primary goal.

2.3. Professional organizations

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the discourse of professional organizations, which consist of insiders, closely resembles the discourse of encyclopedia entries written by interpreters. Looking at the websites of two of the largest professional organizations which represent (AIIC) and also employ (SCIC) simultaneous interpreters, it is possible to see significant emphasis placed on the transfer of the "content" of a message rather than its words. For instance according to the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC):

> To interpret a speech is not to translate it word for word. To interpret a speech from its source language is to *transfer its semantic, connotative and aesthetic content* into another language, using the lexical, syntactic and stylistic resources of the second, or "target" language for that purpose (AIIC's website, my emphasis).

While this description associates conference interpreting with the transfer of the "semantic, connotative and aesthetic content", it also clearly

separates it from translating, which is implicitly associated with word-for-word substitution.

Similar to the AIIC, The Directorate General of Interpreting of the European Commission (SCIC) differentiates interpreting from translating by pointing out that interpreters „enable them [participants] to **communicate** with each other, **not by translating every word they utter, but by *conveying the ideas* which they express"** (SCIC's website, original emphasis).

According to the AIIC, to transfer the message, the interpreter has to „understand the intended message perfectly" (AIIC's website). Once the meaning intended by the speaker is understood perfectly, „it can be detached from the words used to convey it in the original and reconstituted, *in all its subtlety*, in words of the target language" (AIIC's website, my emphasis).

According to professional organizations, in ensuring a perfect rendition of the original meaning, "genuine interpreters identify closely with the speaker and while interpreting (…) adopt the speaker's point of view" (AIIC's website). This identification is most evident in the way interpreters speak in the first person in SI:

> Conference interpreting deals exclusively with oral communication: rendering a message from one language into another, *naturally and fluently, adopting the delivery, tone and convictions of the speaker and speaking in the first person* (SCIC's website, my emphasis).

By identifying with the speaker and adopting his/her first person, the interpreter *becomes* the speaker. It is therefore quite natural that the finest reward for any interpreter is to see the audience act "as though the speaker and the interpreter were one and the same person" (SCIC's website).

In short, professional organizations – as insiders to the profession - clearly delineate interpreting from translating by associating translating with a word-for-word transfer, while describing the goal of conference interpreting as the transfer of the messages intended by the speakers. They also place significant emphasis on the identification of the interpreter with the speaker, as manifested in the use of the first person in interpretation.

2.4. Academia

Presenting the task of conference interpreting as one of ‚rendering the meaning of the original speech into another language' is also widespread in the discourse of academics, particularly in relation to interpreter training. This view is most clearly evident in the *théorie du sens* of Danica Seleskovitch, pioneer of interpreting research and the foremost representative of the ESIT school, whose views still continue to exert direct and indirect influence on both academic and non-academic circles. According to Seleskovitch, interpreting is about rendering the original meaning into the target language by means of a ‚deverbalization' process where the linguistic meaning in the original is first converted to a non-verbal ‚sense':

> Interpretation is not a direct conversion of the linguistic meaning of the source language to the target language, but a conversion from source language to sense, the intermediate link being nonverbal thought, which, once consciously grasped, can then be expressed in any language regardless of the words used in the original language (Seleskovitch 1977: 28).

In Seleskovitch's theoretical framework, although words always carry plural meanings and ambiguity, perfect knowledge of languages coupled with adequate situational and background information will allow interpreters to grasp and render the ‚sense' of a message as intended by the speaker (Seleskovitch 1977: 28).

Roderick Jones (1998) adopts a very strict notion of fidelity and identifies the "exact and faithful reproduction of the original speech" as the main objective in SI, but then goes on to say that deviations from the letter of the original may be permissible if such deviations enhance the audience's understanding of the 'speaker's meaning'. He also argues that additional information provided by the interpreter to bridge cultural gaps and enhance intelligibility does not imply the involvement of the interpreter in shaping the message:

> The conference interpreter must be able to provide an *exact and faithful reproduction of the original speech*. Deviation from the letter of the original is permissible only if it enhances the audience's understanding of the speaker's meaning. Additional information should be provided only if it is indispensable to bridge cultural gaps referred above: *it should in no way involve the interpreter's adding their own point of view to that of the speaker*" (Jones 1998: 5, my emphasis).

Interestingly, while emphasizing the importance of the interpreter not becoming involved while rendering the meaning of the original, commentators from the academic world also stress how vital it is for interpreters to ensure smooth and unproblematic communication through an immediately intelligible delivery. Claude Namy, for instance, argues that "the re-expression should be *clear, unambiguous and immediately comprehensible, that is to say perfectly idiomatic, so that the listener does not have to mentally re-interpret what reaches him through the earphones*" (Namy 1978: 26, my emphasis).

Immediate intelligibility is necessary, Sergio Viaggio (1992) argues, because unintelligible interpreting is "useless" and "bad" and an interpreter "must be aware that he is not paid to understand, or to speak, but to be understood" (Viaggio 1992: 311).

In the literature on SI in Turkish, demands for an objective and faithful rendition of the original meaning in SI also come intermingled with calls for smooth interlingual/intercultural communication. Atasoy (1997), for instance, states that conference interpreters need to "grasp the meaning" and to do so they need to eliminate the "essential" from the "redundant":

> To grasp the meaning, to discover what s/he is perceiving and to carry that discovery to the target language, the interpreter has to filter it in his/her brain. In that filter, redundant words are eliminated and a summary is made; the essential is selected (Atasoy 1997: 125, my translation).

Once in possession of the "essential", having eliminated the "redundant", interpreters render that essence with a smooth and intelligible delivery "using a proper expression in the target language and ensuring the transition with comprehensible and proper sentences" (Atasoy 1997: 125, my translation).

In a similar vein, Derkunt emphasizes that the aim in SI training is to ensure that students "pick out the ideas from within the whole meaning, catch the main idea and then transfer this to the target language in the most natural manner" (Derkunt 1994: 192, my translation). According to the author, "picking out" the main idea by no means implies a personal involvement on the part of the interpreter, because meaning does not reside in linguistic elements, but in the "impartial and objective perception of a reality" (Derkunt 1994: 192, my translation). Acknowledging

that some people face difficulties while interpreting simultaneously, the author claims that these difficulties arise either from a lack of comprehension of the source utterance or from a lack of knowledge of the target culture (Derkunt 1994: 192).

In short, while the image of interpreters as experts who can 'render the meanings intended by speakers' seems to have a hold on academic circles as well, scholars also see 'facilitation of communication' as a critical part of the interpreter's task. Similar to professional organizations, academics do not necessarily regard acts such as the filtering out of 'redundancies' as active interventions by interpreters. In contrast, such filtrations tend to be seen as necessary improvements on *how* speakers formulate their message and not *what* they intend to say. While filtering successfully in order to facilitate communication is presented as a distinctive skill of professional interpreters, these types of interventions are not seen as contradicting the overarching expectation of remaining absolutely loyal to the original message.

2.5. Turkish Media

Having looked at how insiders subscribe to an image of interpreters as experts who render meanings as intended by speakers, it is interesting to note that outsiders tend to share an image of professional conference interpreters as experts who ensure a word-for-word rendition between languages. For instance, members of the media who are naturally outsiders to the profession tend to present 'loyalty' to every *word* and even every *letter* in the original speech as the most distinctive aspect of SI. In that sense, the discourse of the media resembles the discourse of dictionaries, which likewise are written by outsiders to the profession. A typical example of the media's discourse is the following excerpt written by a well-known Turkish columnist, glorifying word-for-word loyalty in SI:

> Imagine you are giving a speech in a conference where by the time you utter the first syllable your words are interpreted into eight languages all at the same time. Nice and virtuous ladies who smoke fags inside the booths *interpret every sentence you say letter for letter* into English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch, and Greek (Hadi Uluengin, *Milliyet* 02.09.1995, my translation throughout this section, my emphasis).

Similarly, a news article from the daily *Milliyet* states:

> Interpreters carry a tremendous responsibility: Is it easy to bear the responsibility for *interpreting the words a speaker utters simultaneously and without making any error*s to another language during a very important meeting? (*Milliyet* 02.09.1989, my emphasis).

Given the significance attached to 'fidelity to the original *word*', it is quite natural that 'mistakes' in SI attract the media's attention to the profession(al). One such mistake is said to have occurred during Helmut Kohl's visit to Turkey:

> Germany's Foreign Minister Mr. Klaus Kinkel has referred to the comments of Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz that were misunderstood due to an interpretation error as "unacceptably tactless". In a meeting in Antalya with German and Turkish members of the press, Mesut Yılmaz, referring to German Chancellor Helmut Kohl had said "Old friends cannot become enemies". However, these words were interpreted as "Our old friend Kohl is our new enemy," leading to a new tension between the two countries (Ahmet Külahçı, *Hürriyet* 03.04.1998).

Clearly, the mistake mentioned in the news excerpt refers to an instance where the interpreter had (supposedly) failed to remain 'loyal' to the speaker's words. A similar 'mistake' is said to have occurred during the negotiations over a decision regarding human rights in Turkey at the European Parliament:

> Some of the expressions used in the decision taken by the European Parliament yesterday on the progress of human rights and democratic reforms in Turkey are still being debated. While the decision was supposed to omit the phrase "Turkish government, the PKK and the representatives of Kurdish organizations", the official decision later contained the same statement. It was reported that this confusion of expression stemmed from the interpretation of the decision into nine languages (*Türkiye* 14.01.1995).

In short, statements from the media would seem to conform to the image of conference interpreters projected by outsiders, in that they place significant emphasis on 'rendering the words of the original to the target language'. Both critical and appreciative comments use 'fidelity to the original *word*' (some even 'fidelity to the original *letter*') as their benchmark in assessing the profession(al). While members of the media praise conference interpreters when (they think) interpreters remain

'faithful to the original word', they do not hesitate to criticize them when (they think) this criteria is for some reason not met.

2.6. Interpreters speaking to the Turkish media

In striking contrast to the professional image of conference interpreters propagated by members of the media, professional interpreters addressing the media seem very keen on emphasizing that their task involves the transfer of not *words,* but of *ideas*. As one well-known conference interpreter in Turkey, interviewed in a TV program, underscores:

> Conference interpreting is the *exact transfer of an idea* voiced in one language to another. I'm saying idea here because conference interpreting and *interpreters are not parrots*, if I may say, *who only interpret whatever words they hear* (Interview with a conference interpreter in Stüdyo İstanbul Program, TRT 2, 25.09.1995, my translation throughout this section, my emphasis).

Or take this interview in a daily with another interpreter:

> Conference interpreting is the *maximum transfer of ideas and opinions* voiced in one language to another - this is never a 100 per cent transfer, it can be 99.9 or so. It is about *conveying ideas in an intelligible manner* in another language (Interview with a conference interpreter in *Cumhuriyet,* 04.09.1989, my emphasis).

As can be seen, in contrast to outsiders, who seem united on accentuating the importance of 'rendering the original words', insiders to the profession insist that conference interpreting is about rendering intended meanings and not words. Furthermore, professional interpreters (similar to professional organizations) underscore the importance of *completely identifying* with the speaker:

> While the interpreter does this, s/he takes over the task of the speaker, *replaces* him. It is no longer the speaker whom people hear and observe, it is the interpreter" (Interview with a conference interpreter in *Cumhuriyet,* 04.09.1989, my emphasis).

Interestingly, and in contrast to all other sources of discourse on SI analyzed until this point, professional interpreters also refer explicitly to the "interpretation" aspect of interpreting, saying:

> A very good translator is someone who knows the most crucial words. But as we said in the beginning, in oral translation there is *interpretati-*

on; the difference is there in the name of the tasks (Interview with two conference interpreters in *Metis Çeviri* 1988: 127, emphasis voiced in English in the original Turkish text).

These professional interpreters thus regard the "interpretation" they perform when interpreting as a factor that distinguishes interpreting from translating. They clearly associate translation with the transfer of words but argue that interpreting requires the transfer of the original message, which also entails their active 'interpretation' of the original meaning. Most strikingly, however, the same interpreters who declare 'interpretation' to be an inherent and distinctive aspect of SI also underline that this "interpretation" never amounts to an intervention in, or deviation from, the original message intended by the speaker:

> The message has to be conveyed very precisely. You cannot allow even the smallest deviation or the smallest intervention. For instance you may not agree with the speaker. In fact you may be people who advocate two totally different ideas. However, the only reason for your presence there is that you are an interpreter, you have a mission to fulfill. *You are making an 'interpretation' but the message must come across exactly*. Maybe you will not find the best word but you will not use a wrong one either. *You must give a correct rendition all the time*. Precision, the transfer of the message are a must (Interview with two conference interpreters in *Metis Çeviri* 1988: 130-131, my emphasis).

As can be seen, although the professional interpreters here emphasize the "interpretation" involved in conference interpreting, they are also eager to point out that this "interpretation" must coincide with the meaning in the original message and never give rise to deviation or intervention.

The (re)presentation of the profession becomes even more complex when interpreters recount instances from their real-life experience. The very same interpreters, who claim that interpreting entails an 'interpretation' but an 'interpretation' that ultimately always coheres with the original meaning, also provide examples from their own interpreting experience of markedly 'subjective' and 'active involvement'.

For instance, when the moderator of a TV program asks the two conference interpreters he is interviewing whether they ever rephrase the words of politicians, one of the interpreters quickly replies: "Well, of course! Our parliamentarians are such that if we were to interpret the way they speak, our audience would think the interpretation was bad".

Her remark receives enthusiastic support from her colleague who defends this strategy by referring to the 'meaning vs. word' opposition, saying: "Interpreting is not the transfer of words from one language to another, it is the transfer of contents" (Interview with two conference interpreters in *İçimizdeki Dünya* Program, TRT 2; 02.06.1997).

Similarly, during the same program, the interpreters recount a professional assignment where they take their seats at an official dinner behind a top representative of the Council of Europe and an Uzbek Minister only to realize that Turkish and Uzbek (thought to be related) have very little in common to an uninitiated ear. Realizing that it is too late to say so, the interpreters invent most of the conversation from whatever they can make out of the Uzbek language, although even their best efforts do not prevent the occasional puzzled looks on the faces of the delegates.

2.7. Popular book on SI in Turkey

The most striking examples within my corpus of the gap between de-contextualized discourse (i.e., that is on what SI should be ideally) and contextualized discourse (i.e., that is what SI is in real situations) appear in a popular book written by a Turkish conference interpreter. Published in 1991, Belkıs Çorakçı-Dişbudak's *Tane Tane Simültane* aims to introduce SI to laypeople and newcomers to that profession. It is full of basic information on the field and anecdotes that the author and her colleagues have collected during their careers, two forms of discourse that tend to project quite different views of SI and the role of the interpreter.

In her de-contextualized accounts of SI, Çorakçı-Dişbudak uses the analogy of the "electronic device" to describe what SI is. The analogy seems to be a well known one since it was apparently first used by Gloria Wagner who gave the first interpreter training in Turkey:

> "You are a device. An electronic device. Don't ever forget that" our teacher Madame Gloria Wagner used to say, may her soul rest in peace. This actually reflects one's stance towards the profession. While simultaneous interpreters transfer the utterances of the speakers at the rostrum into another language, *they cannot add even the shadow of their own existence, thoughts and beliefs*. They do not have the right to do that. Even if they think what is being said is ridiculous or stupid, they cannot reflect that in their voice. They have to voice the views

> with a conviction that is parallel to the speaker's conviction even if they feel ashamed of them deep inside" (Çorakçı-Dişbudak 1991: 29-30, my translation here and throughout this section, my emphasis).

The author goes on to say that, besides not adding even the shadow of their existence, simultaneous interpreters should never skip anything pertaining to the "essence" of the original utterance. When speakers rush, what they can skip can only be the "details":

> I agree that, if the speaker is running, the interpreter cannot render what he says one hundred percent. But what the interpreter will throw away will only be a detail; nothing pertaining to the essence can be thrown away or skipped (Çorakçı-Dişbudak 1991: 12).

Moreover, as electronic devices programmed to transfer whatever original speakers say, interpreters never interfere with the content of the original. They refuse to do so even at the explicit requests of employers:

> Sometimes conference organizers come and say "Don't interpret these (words), we are losing face in front of our foreign guests, just manage the situation". The interpreters will disappoint them because their task requires them to interpret. They are a device. An electronic device (Çorakçı-Dişbudak 1991: 31-32).

Nonetheless, in contrast to her description of simultaneous interpreters as non-involved electronic devices, Çorakçı-Dişbudak later underscores the importance of sustaining the communication in SI and considers certain interventions by the interpreter to be possible:

> Ours is a civilized profession. We do not want to contribute to people standing up and confronting each other. However, we do not have the right to censor something already said either. Between two harsh words, we might opt for the one that is relatively milder. We can construct the sentences in a more civilized form, one that complies more with etiquette and make the assault look less rude. Yet, this is more or less all that can be done (Çorakçı-Dişbudak 1991: 30).

In addition to conceding the viability of 'deliberate' interventions that help to sustain the communication by toning down an assault, the author also contends that simultaneous interpreters "automatically" adjust their delivery to the needs and expectations of their target audience:

> And when we interpret into Turkish, we basically speak according to the average age of those in the room without even noticing that we are

> doing this. It is not that when we enter a room, we take a look at the delegates and say "These people are young" and "These people are old". But since our eyes keep roaming inside the room, our language is automatically shaped according to those that we are facing. Just like a chameleon (Çorakçı-Dişbudak 1991: 114).

Here, the author does not consider the 'automatic' or the 'deliberate' actions taken by interpreters for the sake of sustaining communication to be incompatible with her notion of 'interpreters as electronic devices'. Stressing that conference interpreters are only bound by 'messages' and not 'words', she argues that these interventions take place at the level of wording and not at the level of meaning:

> Simultaneous translation cannot be a word-for-word translation. What is transferred is the message. It is not about translating the sentence but transferring the message (Çorakçı-Dişbudak 1991: 101).

Çorakçı-Dişbudak claims that what distinguishes interpreting from translating is the 'interpretation' involved in interpreting. Just like the interpreters speaking to the media cited in the previous section, the author invokes the English word 'interpretation' in order to underscore the active involvement of the interpreter in the interpretation process:

> We name our profession "simultaneous translation" in Turkish, but in the western languages, there is a nuance there. They do not use the word "translator" for us. The word is **"Simultaneous Interpreter".** All oral translators are called "interpreters", that is, commentator (Çorakçı-Dişbudak 1991: 101, boldfaced text in English and emphasized in the original).

Like other sources of discourse on SI that combine a rigid demand for fidelity with the request for interpreter-improved communication, the author does not problematize how the 'interpretation' in interpreting, which implies a subjective involvement on the part of the interpreter, ties in with the analogy of 'simultaneous interpreters as electronic devices' who never "add even the shadow of their existence" to the delivery.

Indeed, it is quite striking that, just like the discourse of professional interpreters addressing the media, almost all of the anecdotes from real-life interpreting events recounted in Çorakçı-Dişbudak's book indicate an active involvement of the interpreter in the interpreting process. To take one example, the author mentions a colleague of hers who goes

to the French booth and proposes to interpret the next speaker directly from Turkish into French. As she finishes her interpretation, the interpreter in the French booth congratulates her for 'giving a good speech':

> (...) Nuran goes to the French booth and suggests to the foreign interpreter there "If you want, I can work directly from Turkish into French. That might be better than you going via the English". Sure, why do it in a roundabout way when there is a direct way of doing it. The lady likes the idea and says "Oh, please come in". Nuran takes a seat and puts on the headset. The sound is not too good anyway, so Nuran fills in the gaps that she cannot hear and finishes interpreting the whole speech, after which the lady turns to her and says "That was a great speech you gave". "Oh! I just said what he said," says Nuran in an attempt to avoid the situation, but the lady knowingly shakes her finger and adds "Oh no, we listened to the other speech this same person gave last night. We know exactly how he speaks". Some people (mistakenly) call our profession spontaneous interpretation. Maybe the type of interpretation Nuran did that day could indeed be labeled spontaneous interpretation (Çorakçı-Dişbudak 1991: 138).

The book is full of similar anecdotes where interpreters take an active part in formulating what gets transferred. For instance, in one case, an interpreter asks his audience to laugh at a joke saying "The speaker has just started telling a joke which is impossible to interpret. But please do laugh, he will be very happy if you do" (Çorakçı-Dişbudak 1991: 197); in another, a newcomer to the profession who misses a figure in the original speech, announces "The speaker gave a figure that I missed, but it wasn't very much" (Çorakçı-Dişbudak 1991: 119).

Thus, the contextualised accounts of real SI events cited by the author constantly run counter to the analogy of 'interpreters as electronic devices' in the author's decontextualized discourse, thereby hinting at the role of individual as well as social factors in shaping the interpreting process.

3.   Conclusion

The analysis of the meta-discourse on SI in this study points to a significant difference between the professional images propagated by insiders and those projected by outsiders. It also shows that there is often

a discrepancy between the de-contextualized and contextualized discourses of conference interpreters concerning their profession.

To start with the first point, outsiders to the profession present 'fidelity to the *original word*' as the most distinctive aspect of conference interpreting. The representation of the profession(al) in dictionaries, as well as by the media, all foreground the importance of faithfully rendering the words of a speaker into another language. This expectation is particularly striking in the discourse of the media, because both highly appreciative and critical comments center around the notion of 'fidelity to the word'.

In contrast to outsiders, insiders to the profession, most notably professional interpreters and their organizations, explicitly reject the image of conference interpreters as language experts who faithfully render the *words* of the original speech into another language. They claim that interpreters are professionals who render the *meanings intended by the speakers*. They use this professional image to distinguish themselves from translators, whom they see as people who transfer words between languages.

Thus, there seems to be a rather marked contrast between the professional images presented by interpreters and non-interpreters, perhaps hinting at a discrepancy between what outsiders expect from the profession(al), what interpreters deliver, and what SI actually entails.

The discourse on SI becomes even more complex when we analyze the discourse of conference interpreters, that is, insiders to the profession. When commenting on the profession(al) at a conceptual level, without referring to a specific interpreting context, interpreters tend to depict themselves as competent professionals who can unproblematically *identify* with the speaker and access and transfer the meaning intended by them. According to such depictions, conference interpreters never interfere with the 'content' of a speaker's message, though they may improve its 'packaging' to facilitate communication. Improving the 'packaging' of the original is, for interpreters, a natural and, in fact, essential part of their task. It does not contradict the principle of absolute fidelity to the original meaning, since 'meaning' in language is thought to be independent of the words that carry it and simultaneous interpreters are seen as experts who transfer *what* the speakers say rather than *how* they say it.

According to the de-contextualized discourse of the same interpreters, interpreting also involves an 'interpretation', an active and personal involvement in understanding and transferring the meaning in the original utterance. This 'interpretation', however, never contradicts the meaning intended by the speakers.

Paradoxically, interpreters tend to emphasize fidelity and objectivity in their de-contextualized discourse, but when it comes to their contextualized discourse, the anecdotes that the same interpreters relate exemplify almost unfailingly their taking active control over their delivery and making critical decisions on what gets transferred and how. Thus, these interpreters contradict themselves and the image of the profession(al) in their de-contextualized discourse: Through their anecdotes they challenge the idea that professional interpreters do nothing more than access and reproduce the meanings intended by the speakers. They also raise doubts as to the ease with which interpreters are supposed to identify with speakers. Most anecdotes reveal significant complexity in behavior and undermine the widespread image of the professional as the mirror image of the speaker.

Interesting enough, possibly in an attempt to reconcile the 'provocative' images of interpreters in their anecdotal accounts with the fidelity-based role expectations of the outside world, interpreters carefully marginalize their anecdotal accounts, relegating them to the status of 'interesting moments', and hence deviations from the 'normal'. They also stress that, even when they make an 'interpretation', this always coincides with the meaning intended by the speaker. Thus, any sign of potential personal and subjective involvement on the part of the interpreter is suppressed beneath the mainstream discourse of fidelity to, and non-interference with, the original message.

Despite all attempts at reconciliation, the discourse of the insiders continues to remain complex and fragmented, hinting at a much more complicated professional reality than outsiders seem willing to accept and insiders are ready to acknowledge. This complexity certainly merits more scholarly attention.

90

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