

Foreword

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Coordinating Participation in Dialogue Interpreting

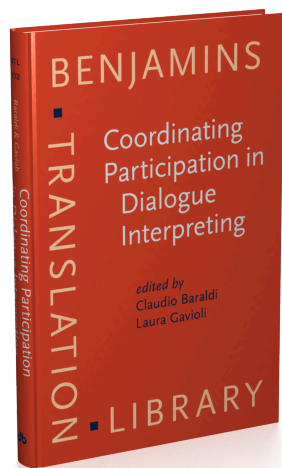
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Foreword

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To a large extent social interaction is coordinated through language. Through language we show how we take responsibility as participants in interaction, how we relate to co-participants, to what they say and to who they are. Through language we show who we are. Through language we can appear as more or less competent – socially and professionally. Interestingly, interpreter-mediated interaction, indeed language-based practices, implies that communication simultaneously becomes public and veiled, variously transparent to those who take part in it. How then, do people understand and cope with this particular kind of encounters?

In recent decades, much knowledge has been gained about the nature of social and discursive practices in public institutions, thanks to studies in applied linguistics, social psychology, anthropology, conversation analysis and other branches of research. A growing number of these studies draw on interpreter-mediated discourse data and constitute an area of research in its own right, known as dialogue, community or public service interpreting. Arguably, there is still much to explore concerning institutional interaction, and not least when it comes to the peculiarities and particularities of dialogue interpreting, including the work of non-language, or non-verbal means in these settings, a theme that has received increased attention lately (e.g. Davitti 2012 and Mason, this volume). The present book provides considerable insight into this vast, varied and challenging field.

The contributions included in the volume are based on empirical data, collected in such diverse social contexts as talk show interviews, healthcare encounters and legal proceedings. The theoretical and analytical approaches also vary, as do the foci, even if the contributors share an interest in language use and understanding and in the organisational nature of interpreter-mediated encounters. *Coordination*, *mediation* and *participation* are the key concepts, put forward and extensively discussed in Claudio Baraldi's and Laura Gavioli's introductory chapter.

The point of departure is the notion of *coordination*, earlier described as central to the performance of interpreters in interaction (Wadensjö 1998). Evidently, also other participants in interpreter-mediated encounters perform a certain coordinating activity. Institutional representatives are supposed to take charge of and hence coordinate their interaction with clients. Basically, any person may feel

obliged or compelled to coordinate an ongoing bilingual multiparty exchange in which they are involved. In the book, one chapter looks particularly at how people at international work meetings take turns in volunteering translations of ongoing talk. Véronique Traverso here, demonstrates how someone's assumed dissociation from the encounter seems to trigger translation from someone else. Translational actions, she shows, are a means by which a shared focus is accomplished and interaction is promoted and maintained. Traverso's contribution forms an original and interesting point of reference for the other chapters in the volume by illustrating how shared understanding, on the basis of which a social encounter comes – and stays – alive, must be central to studies of interpreter-mediated interaction.

In their introduction, making use of diverse theoretical underpinnings such as social system theory (Luhmann 1984) and Conversation analysis (e.g. Heritage 2010), the editors sketch new, interesting avenues for exploring how participants, including interpreters, make their expectations and understandings clear to one another in multiparty, bi- or multi-lingual interaction. The nature of this kind of interaction is complex, as is also the task of interpreters. This should of course not prevent us from systematically exploring and describing it – rather the opposite. To my mind, modern societies cannot afford to underplay the fact that broadcasting, community services, justice, and so forth, are becoming increasingly interpreter-mediated.

In practice, those acting as interpreters may be more or less professionally trained and qualified for the task. Moreover, in some cases, the mandate of an interpreter is well defined in advance between participants, whereas in other cases it is established and re-established more *ad hoc* as interaction unfolds. This range of potential circumstances makes a focus on coordination in studies of interpreter-mediated interaction very reasonable. Explorations of the dynamics of encounters in which participants do not share a common language, in terms such as “basic and reflexive coordination” (Baraldi & Gavioli, this volume), “coordinating participation” (Straniero Sergio, this volume), “code-switching” (Anderson, this volume) and, “mediating assessments” (Zorzi, this volume), makes this book a very welcome source of inspiration for studies of interpreting and related areas.

References

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