

# Introduction

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**The Sign Language Interpreting Studies Reader**

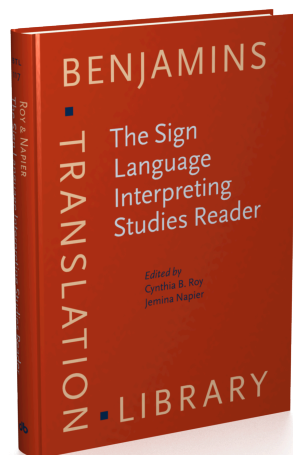
**Edited by Cynthia B. Roy and Jemina Napier**

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# Introduction

The idea for this volume was inspired by Franz Pöchhacker and Miriam Shlesinger's (2002) edited volume, *The Interpreting Studies Reader*, which was, in turn, inspired by *The Translation Studies Reader* (2000) edited by Lawrence Venuti. Both volumes collected essays, articles, and book chapters that represented approaches to the study of translation and interpretation during the twentieth century. It is in the twentieth century that first translation and then interpretation emerged as new academic fields, separate and distinct from their related fields of psychology, linguistics, literary criticism, philology, rhetoric, and philosophy. In both volumes were featured classic and seminal texts about translation and then interpretation. In *The Interpreting Studies Reader* Pöchhacker and Shlesinger featured what they considered to be seminal theoretical and research texts in Interpreting Studies (IS), featuring a range of papers on conference and community interpreting reflecting various methodological and theoretical approaches to the study of interpreting. All the papers selected have made a major impact on our understanding of the socio-historical development of the interpreting profession worldwide, and our academic and scholarly investigation of interpreting processes, products and practices. In particular *The Interpreting Studies Reader* demonstrates how Interpreting Studies (including Sign Language Interpreting) has emerged as a discipline within its own right, which complements Translation Studies. Pöchhacker and Shlesinger's introductory essay covers the name and nature of IS, IS in relation to other disciplines, the evolution of IS, and what it means to define IS as a discipline in its own right. We urge our readers to take account of both volumes when studying translation and/or interpreting.

As Editors of this volume, we felt that it was time to document the same development of *Sign Language Interpreting Studies*, the Sign Language Interpreting (SLI) profession and the research that has contributed to the changing paradigms in our profession. In two relatively recent key articles in the field, Metzger (2006) and Grbić (2007) discuss the evolution of SLI research. In a chronological review of SLI research topics, Metzger analysed 97 published research papers sourced from two main databases, and tracked how the topics, methodologies and paradigms had shifted and expanded over four decades. In essence she noted that initially there were a narrower range of topics and methodologies produced mostly by researchers in the United States, to a broader range on both counts by contributors from all over the world. Grbić's bibliometric analysis of SLI research from 1970 to 2005 places SLI research in the context of wider translation studies. She analysed 908 SLI texts and found that there has been a significant increase in production over that time, with an acceleration in the mid to late 1990s. The majority of texts were published as journal articles or in collective volumes, and were distributed over various key themes.

The themes include discussions of settings and modes, professional issues, quality issues, ethics, role and socio-cultural issues, linguistic issues, cognitive issues and research issues.

Nevertheless, for the purposes of SLI Studies scholarship, there is a need for a volume devoted to both historical pieces and research pieces, some of which may be classic or seminal articles and essays dedicated to this specific domain of language interpreting. Students, educators, and practitioners can benefit from having access to a collection of influential articles that contributed to the progress of the global SLI profession.

In SLI Studies there is a long history of outstanding research and scholarship, and many of the older essays and articles are now out of print, or were published in obscure journals, or featured in publications that are no longer in print. Therefore our selection of papers follows the same philosophy as Pöchhacker and Shlesinger's Reader, in attempting to bring together inaccessible readings with those that are more available. The chosen readings are significant to the progression of SLI Studies as an academic discipline and a profession. As the years have gone by, many of these readings have been lost to students, educators, and practitioners because this audience simply does not know they exist. For example, a common practice in the profession is for conference interpreters to be relieved every twenty minutes. If you ask working interpreters the how or why behind this "rule," most have no idea that it resulted from a study conducted in 1976. The connection to past knowledge and research has been lost. Therefore this volume includes sections devoted to both perceptions and early research forming the study of SLI, observations of experienced practitioners, and investigations from a variety of disciplines in a proportion reflecting the nature of the field.

In putting together this Reader, we are focusing on two main objectives: (1) to share historical perspectives on the development and evolution of SLI, both as an object of study and as a professional practice; and (2) to follow the progress of SLI Studies research. Many of the early studies on SLI were conducted as masters theses or doctoral dissertations and then published in journals unrelated to SLI. Many of the thought-provoking essays were published in books or conference proceedings that are no longer in print and copies are difficult to locate. Many of the authors were practitioners who became interested in research, and several of these researchers are Deaf scholars who did some of the early work on SLI. Moreover, many of these researchers were trained in different disciplines and therefore each contribute different approaches, disciplinary perspectives, and methods to the development of SLI writing and research.

In order to cover a range of seminal texts we did try and source articles and papers from across the world. We recognize, however, that the Reader is dominated by texts that are written in English, and particularly that the majority of papers are from American authors. We did endeavor to include entries that we could get access to, or get permission to include, from non-English speaking countries, but we found them difficult to locate. We have featured three papers in this Reader (one Japanese, one German and one French), which have been translated into English. But we do

acknowledge that there will be papers out there that are written in other languages that may have made an important impact on a national level in terms of development of the sign language interpreting profession in individual countries that we have not included in this Reader.

We also include seminal articles that are widely cited, as well as targeted papers that we think have been overlooked, forgotten, or disregarded by educators and practitioners. Along with each paper, we include biographies of the authors. Some are short as we could not find more information, whereas others are well-known authors in the Deaf/sign language studies fields and had extensive, accessible biographies. Wherever possible, we have contextualized the authors' backgrounds as researchers, or SLI practitioners, or both; and also provided information on their disciplinary backgrounds to inform readers (and primarily students) on the different people, approaches, disciplinary perspectives, and methods that have contributed to the development of SLI Studies writing and research. As noted by Shaffer (2013), the original disciplines and their respective influences on SLI Studies have changed over the course of time, which in turn has influenced the topics of SLI research.

While the progression through the articles in this Reader is somewhat chronological, the articles are also separated into sections by their focus at a particular time in SLI history, or their focus on professional practice. And, we excluded the literature on the teaching of professional skills knowing that it has a vast history of its own.

We know that SLI Studies is still an emerging and expanding research field (Leeson, Vermeerbergen & Wurm 2011), with many more publications produced post-2000, so we hope that this Reader will be a starting point for anyone wanting to delve into SLI education and research, to provide a foundation for understanding the development of our profession and for appreciating where we are at this point in time.

Our cut off point for inclusion in the Reader was 1999, as we felt that papers produced after 2000 are more accessible and widely available. As a consequence, some notable and prolific authors in SLI Studies do not have papers included in this volume, for example, Karen Bontempo, Robyn Dean, Lorraine Leeson, Christine Monikowski, Jemina Napier, Brenda Nicodemus, Debra Russell, Sherry Shaw, Laurie Swabey, and Christopher Stone. The publications of these authors have featured in the literature post-2000, but we would like to acknowledge their significant and continuing contribution to the research field of SLI Studies.

The structure of the book is as follows:

- Chapter 1: Beginnings (late 1960s and early 1970s)
- Chapter 2: Early Empirical Research (1975–1980)
- Chapter 3: Practitioners Become Researchers (1980s)
- Chapter 4: Insights into Practice (1990s)
- Chapter 5: Challenging Perceptions of Profession and Role (1980s–1990s)

- Chapter 6: International Perspectives on the Emerging Profession (1980s–1990s)

Preceding each chapter, there is an overview of the historical background of the chapter, why the papers have been selected as making a seminal contribution to SLI scholarship, followed by brief biographies of the authors.

Finally, we would like to recognize all the authors featured in this Reader for their contributions to development of the worldwide Sign Language Interpreting profession, and for producing such seminal work that inspired us to create this volume.