

BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES
The Faculty of International Business and Economics
The Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication of ASE
10th International Conference: Synergies in Communication (SiC)
Bucharest, Romania, 27-28 October 2022

INFORMATION LOSS IN CONFERENCE INTERPRETING - WHAT IS LOST IN INTERPRETATION?

Matei IDU¹

Abstract

The activity of conference interpreters has long fascinated researchers from different fields of study, but there seems to be no consensus on what interpreting quality is. More precisely, concepts such as fidelity, accuracy or equivalence are so broad that they cannot be studied in their entirety. Interpreting research has attempted, so far, to define quality either in terms of errors by using quantitative studies or by employing qualitative discourse analysis. However, by analyzing omissions from real-life interpreted interactions in mixed-methods research, namely combining a qualitative approach with a quantitative one, we can gain a more thorough and accurate understanding of how interpreters work. Our study aims to conduct such an analysis on a one-hundred-thousand-word corpus of authentic interpreted discourse. Such studies can have a far-reaching impact on norms and ethics, pedagogical approaches and future research avenues, and can be decisive for a field that has not yet reached maturity.

Keywords: conference interpreting; quality; information loss; mixed-methods study; corpus-based research.

DOI: 10.24818/SIC/2022/01.02

Introduction

Despite the fact that interpreting has been practiced for several centuries, only recently has it been established as a field of academic study. The emergence of the field has largely occurred due to the growing need for qualified interpreters and the past two or three decades have illustrated a rise of the discipline, along with study programs, professional organizations, research activities and studies, etc. Initially linked to the field of Translation Studies, interpreting has already experienced quite a few paradigm shifts in its relatively short existence. Interpreting studies could be defined as an interdisciplinary area of research in applied linguistics which comprises both the theory and professional practice of interpreter-aided multilingual communication. The emergence of a discipline devoted to interpreting research in the 1970s is due, to a large extent, to the ambition and leadership of the well-known scholar, Danica Seleskovitch (1968), in Paris. There was an almost exclusive focus on conference interpreting in the beginning, research activity tended to be prescriptive, and it relied mostly on introspection and on persuasion by illustration from the interpreters' daily practice and from the interpreting classroom. It can be argued that in the 1970s, the discipline was profession-driven, profession-oriented and exclusive, thus being atypical for an academic discipline per se.

¹ Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, matei.idu@ubbcluj.ro

The ideas developed by the Paris School have remained influential as a basis for training and they are still cited frequently in pedagogical publications, but as a research paradigm, their influence started to wane rapidly in the 1990s. This was due to a new interest in research, theory and methodology, along with more study programs. The 90s marked a new era in interpreting, an internationalization of interpreting, aided by the development of communication technologies. The 90s also marked an important paradigm turn to cognitive science, psychology and neurolinguistics. Since the year 2000, there was a clear paradigm shift, since decentralization has continued, newcomers have entered the field and community or public service interpreting was included under the aegis of interpreting studies.

“When considered holistically, one objective feature of Interpreting Studies which necessarily limits its effectiveness is its small size, both in the number of active researchers (about 50 worldwide [...]) and in the number of studies conducted each year. Replications and quasi-replications are necessary in order to test and improve theories and methods; without them, general progress is slow.” (Gile, 2009, 45).

Another significant limiting factor is that of very scarce scientific literature in the traditional sense, as well as the reluctance of professionally trained interpreters to go into research and academia. Since a more interdisciplinary approach was adopted towards the study of interpreting, research has somewhat slowed down. Existing research is mostly theoretical or experimental and it can be asserted that after the initial empirical emphasis and the subsequent theoretical turn, currently there is a need to reconcile the two extremes. That is, to generate and establish a complementary relationship between the two and to advance scientific study through norm-based observational and empirical studies linking the theoretical constructs of the field with the realities of interpreted interactions.

All in all, the past century has witnessed a remarkable development of conference interpreting, starting with the consecutive mode, continuing with *in situ* simultaneous and currently developing an increasing presence of remote interpreting. This past century has required interpreters in wars, in peace processes and in international tribunals. The latter part of the century has also seen the rise of community interpreting, due to booming transnational migration and travel. Despite all this, the first comprehensive and definitive scholarly work on interpreting studies belongs to Franz Pöchhacker and was published as recently as 2004. It should be taken into consideration thus, at all times, that interpreting is a young and budding field of academic inquiry. Moreover, as Pöchhacker (2004, 62) himself mentioned, it should be kept in mind that “research on interpreting has been undertaken from various scholarly vantage points, using concepts and methods from a variety of different disciplines, or paradigms.”. As a result of this, many areas remain under-researched, there is hardly any consensus on the big questions and researchers are few.

In this realm of interpreting, scholars who have devoted their publications to conference settings have mostly proposed designing survey-based studies, experimental approaches or theoretical works suggesting abstract norms and rules supposedly governing the activity of all interpreters. At the moment, existing research in the field of interpreting studies contains an enormous gap represented by a lack of empirical observational research. Very few studies rely on the real-life activity of professional conference interpreters. The only way forward for the field is to increase its reliance on such sources, to foment their availability and to scrutinize the status-quo, striving to gain a more thorough and accurate picture of how practitioners work on a daily basis.

Quality and omissions

Interpreting scholars have long struggled to define what quality is. A considerable proportion of the available body of literature in the field focuses on the role of the interpreter and on how professionals can achieve quality when providing their services. Following the path of researchers in translation studies, interpreting scholars have either studied interpreting as a product or as a process, and while there are major divergences between the activity of conference interpreters, on the one hand, and community interpreters, on the other hand, there is still arduous debate with respect to the role of the interpreter and how quality can be achieved within that role. Regardless of the exact approach we choose

to adopt, there is some consensus around the idea that one of the prevailing purposes of interpreters is that of conveying the message of the original utterance, that is, transposing the sense of a speech from a source language into a target language.

This activity of transcoding a message rarely occurs in a word-for-word fashion (except for specific instance of court interpreting, for instance — Mikkelson, 2000). Quite the opposite, in fact, as scholars agree that interpretation, at least in conference settings, should be sense-for-sense — conveying the meaning of an oral speech but not necessarily in the exact form that it was originally uttered in (Seleskovitch, 1968). As a result of this consideration, meaning becomes a central concept in interpreting and the inter-linguistic transfer of meaning is often regarded as the most important aim of conference interpreting practitioners. Bühler (1986) defined this tenet as sense consistency with the original, regarding it as the ultimate criterion in assessing interpreting quality. This central concept of quality has always been perceived, by researchers, professionals and trainers alike, as an elusive and intricate one. In fact, the only piece of consensus around the notion is that its application is “a slippery slope” (Ackermann et al., 1997; Shlesinger, 1997). Since it is acknowledgedly so multi-faceted, scholars have often attempted to find alternative terms in order to avoid quality, and have thus preferred to study accuracy, completeness, fidelity, equivalence, correspondence and so on. What resulted from this, unfortunately, was an amalgamation of remarkably divergent and heterogeneous use of similar terms of which there is no uniform or universal understanding. What did become clear, however, over the years, was the quality “does not easily lend itself to empirical measurement” (Collados Aís and García Becerra, 2015, 334).

This has not deterred researchers from theoretically investigating the norms that are integral to quality. Thus, the aspect of meaning has also become vital, as it is at the core of the transfer of meaning that interpreters continuously conduct. Venuti (2004) claimed that all linguistic information has a form, a specific semantic sense and an effect, but in the case of interpreting services, meaning must be understood with regard to the precise communicational aim of the activity. Seeing the inherent immediacy that is characteristic to interpreting (Pöchhacker, 2016, 10), the transfer of meaning is different from the same process in written texts. Lederer (1978) famously suggested the use of units of meaning, understood as segments of sense. This notion was considered helpful and could indeed represent a breakthrough if applied in empirical studies, since interpreters seek to identify units and not individual words, before transposing them into the target language. Units of meaning have not yet been used, however, in observational research because of the prevailing methodological limitation that these chunks of speech are not a uniform segmentation of syntactical units. Until the 1980s, scholars have thus been concerned mainly with the transfer of meaning that interpreters conduct. Subsequently, Pöchhacker (2016, 173) noted that “while quality in interpreting has been a basic concern underlying the process of professionalization, its emergence as a topic of research dates back only to the 1980s”. This is especially the case in the realm of conference interpreting, as more attention has been given to the professionalization of the job, the qualifications and skills of the practitioners, the professional standards they must abide by. All in all, quality is to be perceived, according to Pöchhacker (2016, 173) as “an essentially relative and multi-dimensional concept which can and must be approached with different evaluation methods from a variety of perspectives”.

A few of the first groundbreaking studies conducted in interpreting quality belonged to Barik (1969, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975), a scholar who believed that error counts can define and measure interpreting quality. He performed a quantitative analysis on the main three types of mistakes, namely omissions, substitutions and additions, and regarded their frequency as the main parameter for interpreting quality. His approach was considered a breakthrough in the beginning but over the years, scholars started seeing more and more flaws and limitations and the methodology came in for a good deal of criticism. More precisely, once quality was covered more extensively by other scholars mainly from a theoretical standpoint, the research community realized that a quantitative outlook is not capable of providing a thorough image of quality. More importantly, Barik regarded all omissions as errors and categorized them as such without taking into account contextual factors, problem triggers and the potential intent of professionals. Daniel Gile (1999), one of the staple names of the field took up the issue towards the

turn of the century, as did Robin Setton (1999), and both scholars started linking the phenomenon of missing content to broader considerations linked to ethics, cognitive studies and potential causes. It wasn't until 2005, however, that scholars started consistently looking at omissions as techniques, as strategical tools purposefully and deliberately employed by interpreters and this was a major breakthrough (Napier, 2005). It came from the area of community interpreting at first, with scholars such as Holly Mikkelson, Sandra Hale, Jemina Napier and so on, but was quickly adopted, as an alternative viewpoint, in conference interpreting as well. Since then, however, very little was done in this direction — there are very few empirical and observational studies that deal with real-life interpreted material (Bendazzoli, 2010) and even fewer studies linking such resources to the issue of omissions (latest being Cox, 2019).

Evidently, these are not the only researchers who turned towards studying the fascinating issue of non-renditions, but the most problematic factor that has been deterring scholars actively from pursuing this research avenue is represented by two prevailing methodological difficulties. We have already alluded to the first one, namely the idea that not rendering or failing to transcode certain speech elements can sometimes be an unconscious interpreting error, on the one hand, but can equally represent a deliberate and strategically employed interpreting technique. While the majority of the first few decades in interpreting studies have been dominated by the former perspective, the turn of the century has brought more clarity in research with respect to strategies that interpreters can use when facing insurmountable problem trigger. The work of Jones (1998) was massively important to raising awareness with respect to the latter perspective, acknowledging the actual intent on behalf of professionals when committing certain omissions. Since then, very few empirical and observational studies have attempted to integrate both accounts and that is because of a major limitation in that such descriptive studies where the researcher acts as a completely external factor cannot provide valuable insights into intent. In other words, it is largely impossible to draw conclusions with a safe degree of certainty as to whether an interpreter meant to omit something or simply missed it without coming into contact with the practitioner. As a result of this important limitation, research has preferred, over the last two decades, to focus on experimental studies that can enable such studies and can shed a light on intent.

However, these research approaches have been heavily criticized and there is some consensus emerging around the idea that this avenue has been exhausted and that while intent can become clear in post-interpreting interviews with professionals, they only reveal a part of the more complex interpreting landscape. The main point of criticism refers to the fact that experimental studies create artificially designed contexts for interpreters and as a result of the lack of naturalness, interpreters tend to alter their normal behavior. In other words, it becomes clear that there is a high degree of evanescence that comes with an interpreter's activity — their output is uttered, heard, (ideally) understood but it is not stored in any way. Consequently, unlike translators who know, from the very start, that their final product can be subject to thorough analysis, interpreters rely on the evanescence of their output thinking that it will not be the object of a subsequent scrutiny (Shlesinger, 1989, 114). On the other hand, interpreting research has also steered more towards the direction of experimental research due to institutional and legal limitations regarding confidentiality and data protection, but this issue will be addressed in the following chapter. Returning to the idea that interpreting 'dies in the air', Krämer (2006, 38) managed to identify a related limitation, namely that "many interpreters are reluctant to have their output scrutinized". As a result of these considerations, we can safely assert that while insights into intent are definitely achievable in certain research contexts, those insights might not be revealing or representative for the larger phenomenon being studied.

A second but equally imposing limitation to studying omissions in this field is related to the lack of methodological clarity and uniformity. In order to be able to conduct a proper examination, one would need a sound methodological framework and these are remarkably scarce at the moment. Moreover, this incomplete methodological picture has not allowed for any replications of studies, which would be needed in order to verify and confirm the reliability of these approaches. The field of interpreting studies has already been around for six or seven decades, but in that time there were only five scholars who put forward taxonomies meant for the study of omissions. The first one was Henri Barik (1969), whose

taxonomy has already been tackled and who has brought major advancements to the study of interpreting errors, despite subsequently receiving considerable scholarly criticism. The impact is however undeniable and we can still see modern reverberations and acknowledgment of the taxonomy's importance. Vančura (2017, 6) called the framework “a veritable breakthrough” and Cox (2019, 49) argued that “Barik’s classification (1971), despite being one of the oldest, probably remains the most well-known [being] an elaborate classification of omissions, additions and substitutions/errors that was initially innovative”. In contrast, Gerver’s (1969) classification of interpreting ‘discontinuities’ from the same year can hardly be considered a taxonomy in its own right. Gerver’s work on omissions must however be mentioned here, as he was the first to find an empirical correlation between not rendering speech elements, on the one hand, and the continuous time constraints that interpreters face. Simply put, he argued, the higher the rate of delivery of the original speech, the higher the number of omissions.

Barik’s impact was felt on subsequent attempts at drawing up methodologies and a good example in that sense is Kopczynski (1980), who added the categories of obligatory and optional omissions. This methodological attempt has not received much attention from other scholars and that might be attributed to the fact that it represents, in fact, a mere dichotomy between the two — optional and obligatory non-renditions. Kopczynski has, in fact, conducted impressive studies on interpreting quality, among other topics, his simplistic taxonomy managed to pave the way for further research and contributed to raising awareness regarding the idea that some linguistic elements are either untranslatable or *should* not be rendered. Over a decade later, Cokely (1992) also attempted to refine the initial methodology put forward by Barik and adapted it to the emerging field of signed language interpreting, which faced a dire need for some methodological clarity. Cokely’s taxonomy differentiated morphological and lexical omissions from cohesive non-renditions. Subsequently, Wadensjö (1998) used the approaches of Barik and Cokely in order to design a viable way to tackle interpreting in dialogic contexts. This represented an important stepping stone, first of all due to the scholar using more positive connotations by means of her terminology (Napier, 2015), but mostly because it was the first attempt to move beyond monologic interpretation following only one linguistic direction. Thus, Wadensjö distinguished between reduced renditions, summarized renditions and zero renditions, where only the latter implied the total absence of any translation. This approach was well-regarded and most replications occurred in public service interpreting and more precisely, in medical interpreting (Amato, 2007; Cirillo, 2012).

Despite some variations, notable additions and more potential for replicability, these taxonomies mostly followed the same pattern and stayed within the same paradigm. It was Napier (2005) who was the first researchers to conduct an ample study on omissions understood as strategies. The context was that of a university lecture and the theoretical underpinning included the idea that interpreters can also act as inter-cultural mediators, along with their linguistic duties. Hence, Napier famously drew a clear separating line between intentional and unintentional omissions before concluding that most non-renditions are, in fact, unconscious errors. Despite this clear-cut conclusion, the institution of the dichotomy changed the face of how researchers would approach omissions in the coming years and the taxonomy needs to be singled out as a replicable and reliable one. However, in order to be able to differentiate, as Napier did, between conscious strategic, conscious intentional, conscious unintentional, conscious receptive and unconscious omissions, the researcher needs to have access to the exact thought process of the interpreter immediately after the delivery of the output and, as we have already argued, this implies the use of artificial interpreted interactions and experimental research.

Apart from these most notable publications delving into the fascinating aspect of interpreting omissions, the field has seen numerous other attempts at dealing with the issue, but few actually managed to escape the traditional thought patterns and give rise to new methodological considerations. Riccardi’s (2002) omission framework differentiating between negligible, strategic and disturbing omissions also has more than a few drawbacks, while Cox’s (2019) separation of functional and non-functional omissions fosters some methodological potential but lacks rigor and actual replications. Other researchers preferred to study omissions empirically and usually limited the scope of the term considerably, as did Hatim and Mason (1990) when examining ‘selective reductions’, Sunnari (1995) on condensing strategies or Bartłomiejczyk (2006) on strategic non-renditions in relation to directionality.

In a nutshell, the topic of omissions has drawn a fair share of researchers over the ages, but the issue remains largely under-studied. Today's scholars cannot find a consensus on what omissions are, how they must be understood, analyzed and assessed, let alone categorized. The confusing research landscape that oscillated, without clarity or delimitations, from errors to strategies is actively deterring further investigations into the issue. Most of the scholars dealing with omissions have at least touched, at one point or another, on the larger concepts of quality and fidelity, for instance. Others have devoted their publications to these principles and happened to run into the intricate mess represented by omissions. Regardless of their exact research path, these experts have managed to establish some sort of link between the practical aspect of not transcoding speech elements and the much wider aspect of quality. Details as to what that link is exactly, how it can be defined and evaluated have not yet emerged. Seeing that the majority of these methodological frameworks have severely limited scopes and consequently a limited potential for replicability, present day researchers need to navigate an outdated and unclear scholarly picture in order to be able to tackle interpreting omissions in a competent manner.

Advancing interpreting studies

It is against this dire backdrop that the field of interpreting studies needs to find innovative ways of moving forward. The aim of this second chapter is to briefly outline a few avenues for future research and to emphasize how certain deadlocks that are currently troubling researchers can be broken down and surpassed. First of all, the impact of experimental research has been discussed and these types of approaches are indeed valid and relevant towards studying aspects such as intent. On the other hand, research seems to have exhausted this avenue and it has made the most of those areas that can truly be examined in a relevant manner. Despite having the potential to shed light on certain issues like intent, experimental research is remarkably limited and, most importantly, it shares a very shallow bond with real-life interpreted interactions. At the moment, there is a remarkable scarcity of resources where scholars can access such authentic material and it is precisely due to this that more and more experts have been resorting to designing artificial settings. While interpreting is practiced every day around the world in courtrooms, hospitals, conference halls, universities, mass-media, police stations and a virtually endless number of settings, more and more of the activities governing these events and their actors are subject to legislation that intends to protect them. In doing so, however, today's confidentiality guidelines and general data protection legislation considerably limit research possibilities and opportunities. Simply put, researchers cannot access records or cannot use material pertaining to events and actors from interpreted interactions for research purposes mainly due to legal requirements. These are, however, negatively complemented by a lack of transparency and openness that characterizes numerous institutions employing interpreting services.

Taking a brief look back into recent history can show us the advantages and the drawbacks of these new legalities for research. While the importance and the benefit of data protection legislation around the world cannot be denied or overlooked in any way, it becomes apparent that it hampers conducting studies in interpreting. A case in point is Susan Berk-Seligson, a community interpreting scholar who conducted what is most probably the most ample and thorough examination of court interpreting practices in the U.S. (2002). She was able to conduct her study in the 90s, taking advantage of permissive legislation and open-minded institutions. More precisely, there was a short time span of loose legislation that allowed for the recording of audio material in court rooms with the consent of the social actors involved. Berk-Seligson met her fair share of excessive rigor, denials and criticism before being able to complete a research project that has changed the face of court interpreting in a decisive manner. This study that can be regarded as the most important one in court interpreting ever carried out managed to shed a light on unknown practices, a lack of training, an ethical uncertainty and a certain level of unjustness. Legal actors were just learning how to work with interpreters, the courtroom dynamics were constantly changing, defendants were asking interpreters for legal advice and interpreting practitioners often had very different ethical, linguistic and cultural approaches. The upheaval that the study created within the research community at first led to a remarkable process of raising awareness, regulating the activity of interpreters and to more social understanding with respect to interpreters in the courtroom. Berk-Seligson's study decisively advanced the field of study and

improved the practice of interpreting in legal settings. Unfortunately, such ample empirical studies cannot be envisaged nowadays or in the near future, precisely as a result of stricter legislation.

Using real-life interpreted material for research purposes always implies obtaining approval from relevant bodies and stakeholders and while this might be a more difficult process in certain cases, the development of more studies looking into how interpreters actually work on a daily basis can be massively beneficial for the field and ultimately, for the activity itself. Several researchers have been asking for a higher number of descriptive and observational studies, as it is when the interpreter is not aware that their output will be analyzed that their conduct will be normal and the findings of the research project can be considered relevant and representative for the larger phenomenon. Such studies can reveal systematic patterns and give rise to new issues, whether behavioral, ethical, linguistic or cultural, allowing researchers, along with other practitioners to gain a better understanding of how interpreters actually work (Kahane, 2000; Bendazzoli and Sandrelli, 2005). At least in the case of community interpreting where it is more evident, interpreters also have a cultural mediation role, as people who need an interpreter in public services usually come from significantly different socio-cultural backgrounds and that can have a considerable impact on the communicational process. Cultural gaps can cause communication to break down even if an interpreter provides a literal translation and there is some mutual understanding. Bridging these gaps in interpreting is key in order to facilitate that understanding and it is especially in such contexts that more empirical research is needed on authentic interpreted interactions. While the current literature abounds in theoretical and abstract attempts at defining and delineating the role of the professional in different settings, it is only the example of actual communication that can provide researchers with the unaltered reality of interpreting services. Unfortunately, research in public service interpreting is also correspondingly limited due to confidentiality legislation.

As a side note, authentic material is important not only because it can reveal more about interpreting difficulties, techniques and procedures, but also because interpreting training can rely on it quite heavily. Currently, interpreting trainees tend to use pedagogical materials that are designed in such a way that they resemble genuine speeches and contexts as much as possible. The range of online platforms that give out speeches for practice purposes, such as Speech Repository or Speech Pool, imitate the features of real-life interactions where interpreting services are needed. Using more similar sources is said to be beneficial for the training of future interpreters, as they can familiarize themselves with the necessary requirements and the common procedures (Bendazzoli and Sandrelli, 2005). Furthermore, it can also be argued that by having access to the performances of professional interpreters, trainees can learn more about their future career and the standards they need to uphold.

The second major way for the field to advance at this point is by employing more corpus-based approaches. This is certainly related to the need for more accessible real-life material, but on the one hand, institutions might be more open-minded when it comes to well-defined small and medium corpora that uphold strict anonymizing procedures, for instance. On the other hand, there are quite a few corpora that are available at the moment and that can be exploited toward specific research purposes. Arguably the most impressive one, tapping into an incredible load of potential and exploring uncharted territory, was the creation of EPIC (the European Parliament Interpreting Corpus), fostering a wide array of English, Italian and Spanish interpreted discourse. One of the key figures in research who has repeatedly called for more corpus-based studies and who has correspondingly designed pioneer work is Claudio Bendazzoli. Thus, the works of Bendazzoli and Sandrelli (2005), Monti, Bendazzoli, Sandrelli and Russo (2005) and Russo, Bendazzoli, Sandrelli and Spinolo (2012) have proved to be essential towards understanding the potential of such approaches. Corpus linguistics has been gaining considerable ground over the last decade or so and the time has come for corpus-based interpreting studies to emerge. So far, corpora have been used in a quite limited fashion by scholars, but the diversity of topics that can be examined by means of large collections of texts is remarkable. Monti et. al. (2005) studied directionality, Russo, Bendazzoli and Sandrelli (2006) examined lexical patterns, Waasaf and Lourdes (2007) investigated intonation, while Spinolo and Garwood (2010) scrutinized the issue of metaphors in interpreting. Subsequently, other researchers started becoming more aware of the potential that this

research avenue fosters and continued corpus-based studies on a number of issues: disfluencies (Bendazzoli et. al., 2011), anticipation (Liontou, 2012), quality-related perceptions (García Becerra, 2012), etc. More recently, there are examples of corpus-based studies focusing on court interpreting (Orozco-Jutorán, 2019).

Not all modern environments are governed by strict legislation and the public nature of output coming from television and mass-media, for instance, have allowed interpreting corpora to thrive in these settings (Straniero Sergio, 2007; Wang, 2012; Sandrelli, 2012). The idea of emphasizing corpora is hardly new, as it had been suggested before the turn of the century, initially being perceived as an offshoot of the more well-established corpus-based translation studies (Shlesinger, 1998). It is encouraging to see that despite adversities, interpreting corpora have somewhat been on the rise and are considered to be vital towards the advancement of the field of study (Setton, 2011). Most of the instances of studies that were mentioned here relied on smaller sets of data, yet this is not regarded as a downside. Bendazzoli and Sandrelli (2005, 2) noticed that:

corpus-based research is already a well-established branch of Translation Studies, whereas corpus-based interpreting studies as a discipline is still in its infancy. Indeed, several so-called “corpus-based” interpreting studies of the last few years contain analyses of very small sets of data, e.g. one individual interpreter’s performance in a single conference (or even part of a conference).

Even before this approach came about, Shlesinger (1998, 487) argued, quoting Johansson (1992), that “it might be more appropriate, for the time being at least, to make do with smaller, carefully-constructed sample corpora”. We also firmly believe that corpora can help researchers find systematic patterns and identify new issues in interpreting, and regard that as beneficial towards the ultimate improvement of practice itself. Only by knowing how interpreters work and what they do, can we begin to design better technical solutions and innovative pedagogical approaches. Uniform transcription procedures and representativeness still represent key issues when it comes to corpus-based approaches and that is precisely why researchers should strive to bring more clarity to how interpreting must be tackled. For instance, the same speech might be transcribed in a number of ways depending on the exact research aim.

Finally, it has become apparent thus far that the field of interpreting studies is currently struggling with what we can call a methodological stalemate, finding itself between a rock and a hard place, with the excessive theoretical literature on the one hand and the difficulties of empirical studies on the other hand. In order for the field of study to go forward towards maturity and a better professionalization of interpreting, research needs to reach more universally accepted definitions for main concepts. There needs to be some consensus around what fidelity is, how we can achieve quality and what qualifies as an omission, for example. The latter is a remarkably elusive notion, for instance and Pym (2008, 87) suggested that, besides the fact that there is substantial disagreement within interpreting studies as to what omissions really are, “arguments seem to be ‘for’ vs. ‘against’ omission, with very few attempts actually to answer the question of ‘valid’ vs. ‘invalid’ omission”. Another clear-cut example of how omissions represent a volatile concept can be found in the most wide-spread and widely recognized code of ethics for professional conference interpreters, pertaining to the AIIC (The International Association of Conference Interpreters). Despite periodic updates brought to the code, the document has received plenty of scholarly criticism (e.g. Seeber and Zelger, 2007; Ozolins, 2015), showcasing the absence of principles of ethical nature and the total lack of rules of conduct teaching interpreters how ethical principles can be achieved in practice. Out of the fifteen articles of the code, article number ten is especially relevant to the issue of omissions, as it states that “interpreters shall strive to translate the message to be interpreted faithfully and precisely. They shall endeavor to render the message without embellishment, omission or alteration” (2022). It becomes apparent that the code illustrates a theoretical and abstract ideal that it does not detail further in any way. Firstly, there is no explanation as to what “faithfully” means, and secondly, the strategic use of omissions seems to be disconsidered completely. Such a prestigious code of ethics should not limit itself to general assertions and delve into what omissions refer to in the vision of the association, as they can be understood as failing to render

speech elements in general or it can refer to specific units that carry a greater importance. Even if the dichotomy is applicable in this sense, the code would also need to specify what are those central speech elements that must not be omitted. In a nutshell, the code seems to position itself in a realm that is somewhat detached from the realities of daily interpreting practice, besides the fact that it hardly serves as a clarification of major concepts. Some scholars have gone so far as to argue that the association deterred the elaboration of similar codes of ethics by other bodies (Bancroft, 2005).

Thus, it is imperative for scholars to start filling this massive research gap themselves by attempting to reach more universal definitions for the main concepts that both scholars and practitioners employ on a daily basis. This activity would also entail some level of methodological uniformization of the field, which is much needed at the moment in order to further facilitate research. The current methodological stalemate, along with the absence of resources for studying authentic interpreted material have arguably brought forward a body of literature that tends to be largely theoretical in nature. The number of experimental studies has also somewhat decreased over the last decade or so and more studies are turning towards abstract viewpoints that hardly represent what interpreting needs for the time being. Instead of limiting research to such undertakings and approaches, scholars should return to conducting mixed-methods investigations making use of small corpora and limited sets of data. Besides being achievable, this would be substantially beneficial for the field. Linguistics has recently seen a shift that guides researchers to integrating more quantitative perspectives in their projects and interpreting studies could benefit greatly from aligning itself to this current trend. As previously argued, a good part of the literature that interpreting scholars put forward in the first two decades after the field was established was largely quantitative in nature. Since the 90s, such research has been harshly criticized relying on the idea that for a complex and intricate activity such as interpreting, error counts and quantitative takes cannot offer a thorough picture. While this may indeed have some truth to it, the time has come for interpreting studies to take the route of mixed-methods research, as the qualitative perspectives of scholars can very well be complemented by insights gathered from quantitative examinations. Analyzing omissions is a case in point — while Barik certainly did not illustrate the thorough landscape of interpreting mistakes by performing error counts, integrating such a standpoint into literature that seeks to analyze non-renditions qualitatively could be massively advantageous. Taking a look at numbers and figures can also provide valuable insights when it comes to analyzing pace and time constraints, cognitive processes, interpreting delay, and several other under-researched issues.

Finally, the time has also come for the field to embrace everything that modernity is slowly starting to impose as being feasible. Remote interpreting is on the rise and while the practice is lagging behind, the field of study is booming and will continue to do so. Likewise, computer-assisted interpreter training and preparation, as well as machine interpreting are innovative sub-fields that scholars need to acknowledge and address in the years to come. Moreover, ethics is also being given attention in conference settings and not only in community interpreting. Ultimately, whatever new prospects and challenges the field might face in its future, it is paramount for the activity of researchers to be well-rooted in the practical activity of professionals. Unfortunately, this has happened only to a limited extent until now.

Conclusions

The main purpose of the present article was to illustrate a brief discussion of omissions and quality in interpreting and to showcase the inter-related character of the two concepts. Additionally, seeing the severe deadlock that the field finds itself in nowadays, we also attempted to suggest a few ways of advancing research with the ultimate aim of improving interpreting practice. We must acknowledge, above all else, that interpreting studies is a field that is still in its infancy and has certainly not reached maturity yet. While it has been subject to a fair share of paradigm shifts — ranging from cognitive approaches and exclusively linguistic perspectives to interdisciplinarity and empirical investigations — interpreting scholars still know little about how interpreters work on a daily basis. It is against this backdrop that experts have called for the creation of a virtuous cycle that would include research,

training and practice, and we believe this inter-dependent circle to be essential towards the advancement of interpreting as a field of scientific inquiry.

Several scholars have alluded to this paramount relationship, along with the need for more raw interpreting data, instead of the traditional insistence on theoretical frameworks (Setton, 1999; Amato and Mead, 2002). Pöchhacker (2002) was the first to make the relation explicit, as he insisted on stronger links between the activity of professionals on the one hand, and the research community on the other hand. It becomes sensible to acknowledge the idea that the daily activity of practitioners can continuously give birth to new issues and questions and it is the duty of research to tackle these and to find potential solutions and frameworks which practitioners can employ or refer to. Subsequently, it is up to the pedagogical experts to implement the approaches of research in the educational material they put forward, with the aim of completing the circle and ensuring a higher quality of interpreting services in the future.

We have seen that both omissions and quality represent remarkably intricate and multi-faceted concepts and while the latter has been approached from multiple standpoints and even from different disciplines, the inextricably linked study of omissions has lagged behind, mainly because of methodological difficulties and the absence of authentic interpreter material. As a result of these considerations, we have established that it is now the duty of the interpreting research community to call for more resources providing real-life materials or make do with smaller sets of data in order to get in touch, once again and properly this time, with the day-to-day activity of practitioners. At the same time, analyzing interpreters as actors and interpretations as final products needs to rely on sound methodological frameworks, of which there are few in the literature that now makes up interpreting studies. While at the beginning, scholars preferred error counts and quantitative approaches, subsequent peers realized that such examinations cannot reveal the absolute truth behind an interpreted interaction. However, making use of the rising sub-field of corpus-based interpreting studies, scholars should now combine the assets of qualitative examinations with quantitative insights into interpreting performances, seeking to illustrate an image that is as close to reality as possible. This way, the research community can yield more competent results over the following years.

All in all, the field seems to be opening up steadily towards innovative ideas, techniques and concepts, but we must acknowledge that it is difficult for a domain that has not yet reached maturity to efficiently deal with everything from remote interpreting to computer-based training and ethics. However, as the number of real-life encounters and settings that need interpreting services is on the rise, scholars, practitioners and trainers must undertake joint efforts to keep up with blooming trends, in order to provide quality services. An additional difficulty is represented precisely by the diversity of situations that need interpreters in the modern world — the practice of these professionals is different in courtrooms or hospitals than it is in conference halls, police stations or refugee camps. In a nutshell, the role of the interpreter — another topic that has received extensive coverage over the years — comes down to the contextual specificities of the interpreted interaction. It is a common scholarly idea that ethics seems to matter more in public service interpreting than in conference interpreting, just like the conduct of practitioners is subject to different legal and professional guidelines. It is the duty of scholars and international bodies such as the AIIC to regulate the behavior of interpreters and to act as an rulebook for them.

Ultimately, we must acknowledge that interpreting, regardless of its form, medium, mode or setting, is significantly more than an linguistic activity. Social actors and stakeholders employ interpreters on a daily basis in order to be able to communicate efficiently, but all communication is primarily culture-dependent. While these actors manage to get their point across and can receive information back in a different language, the ethical, linguistic, legal and cultural complexities of transferring that meaning from one person to another is something that nobody has grasped in its entirety yet. Bendazzoli (2010, 51) managed to perfectly sum up the exact spot that interpreting studies finds itself it nowadays, by arguing that the scientific vitality of the field “is reflected in the extensive body of literature currently

available, which continues to expand and shows the unlimited facets of interpreting as something more than an inter-linguistic and inter-cultural activity”.

References and bibliography

Ackermann, D., Lenk, H. & Redmond, M. (1997). Between Three Stools — Performance Assessment in Interpreter Training. In E. Fleischmann, P.A. Schmitt and W. Kutz, *Translationsdidaktik: Grundfragen der Übersetzungswissenschaft*, (pp. 262-267). Gunter Narr.

AIIC (International Association of Conference Interpreters). (2022). Code of Professional Ethics. Available at https://aiic.org/document/10277/CODE_2022_E&F_final.pdf

Amato, A. & Mead, P. (2002). Interpreting in the 21st century: What lies ahead. In G. Garzone and M. Viezzi (Eds.) *Interpreting in the 21st Century: Challenges and Opportunities*, (pp. 295-302). John Benjamins.

Amato, A. (2007). The interpreter in multi-party medical encounters. In C. Wadensjö, B. Englund Dimitrova and A.-L. Nilsson (Eds.), *The Critical Link 4: Professionalisation of Interpreting in the Community*, (pp. 27-38). John Benjamins.

Bancroft, M. (2005). *The Interpreter’s World Tour: An Environmental Scan of Standards of Practice for Interpreters*. National Council on Interpreting in Health Care.

Barik, H.C. (1969). A study of simultaneous interpretation. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Barik, H.C. (1971). A description of various types of omissions, additions and errors of translation encountered in simultaneous interpretation. *Meta* 16(4), 199-210.

Barik, H.C. (1972). Interpreters talk a lot among other things. *Babel* 18(1), 3-10.

Barik, H.C. (1973). Simultaneous interpretation: temporal and quantitative data. *Language and Speech* 16(3), 237-270.

Barik, H. C. (1975). Simultaneous interpretation: Qualitative and linguistic data. *Language and Speech*, 18, 272-297.

Bartłomiejczyk, M. (2006). Strategies of simultaneous interpreting and directionality. *Interpreting* 8(2), 149-174.

Bendazzoli, C. & Sandrelli, A. (2005). An approach to corpus-based interpreting studies: developing EPIC (European Parliament Interpreting Corpus). In S. Nauert (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Marie Curie Euroconferences MuTra: Challenges of Multi-dimensional Translation*. Saarbruecken, May 2005, (pp. 1-12). Retrieved from https://www.euroconferences.info/proceedings/2005_Proceedings/2005_Bendazzoli_Sandrelli.pdf

Bendazzoli, C. (2010). The European Parliament as a Source of Material for Research into Simultaneous Interpreting: Advantages and Disadvantages. In N. L. Zybatow (Ed.), *Translationswissenschaft – Stand und Perspektiven*. Innsbrucker Ringvorlesungen zur Translationswissenschaft VI (Forum Translationswissenschaft, Band 12), (pp. 51-68). Peter Lang.

Bendazzoli, C., Sandrelli, A. & Russo, M. (2011). Disfluencies in simultaneous interpreting: A corpus-based analysis. In A. Kruger, K. Wallmach and J. Munday (Eds.), *Corpus-based Translation Studies: Research and Applications*, (pp. 282-306). Continuum.

Berk-Seligson, S. (2002). *The Bilingual Courtroom* (1st ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Bühler, H. (1986). Linguistic (semantic) and extra-linguistic (pragmatic) criteria for the evaluation of conference interpretation and interpreters. *Multilingua* 5(4), 231-235.

Cirillo, L. (2012). Managing affective communication in triadic exchanges: Interpreters’ zero-renditions and non-renditions in doctor–patient talk. In C. J. Kellett Bidoli (Ed.), *Interpreting across Genres: Multiple Research Perspectives*, (pp. 102-124). Edizioni Università di Trieste.

Cokely, D. (1992). *Interpretation: A Sociolinguistic Model*. Linstok Press.

Collados Aís, A. & García Becerra, O. (2015). Quality. In H. Mikkelsen and R. Jourdenais (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Interpreting*, (pp. 368-383). Routledge.

- Cox, E. (2019). Accuracy: Omissions in consecutive versus simultaneous interpreting. *International Journal of Interpreter Education*, 11(2), 46-63.
- García Becerra, O. (2012). First impressions in interpreting quality assessment: The incidence of nonverbal communication. In A. Jiménez Ivars and M. J. Blasco Mayor (Eds.), *Interpreting Brian Harris: Recent Developments in Translatology*, (pp. 173-192). Peter Lang.
- Gerver, D. (1969). The effects of source language presentation rate on the performance of simultaneous interpreters. In F. Pöchhacker and M. Shlesinger (Eds.), *The Interpreting Studies Reader*, (pp. 53-66). Routledge.
- Gile, D. (1999). Variability in the perception of fidelity in simultaneous interpretation. *Hermes* 22, 51–79.
- Gile, D. (2009). *Basic Concepts and Models for Interpreter and Translator Training*. John Benjamins.
- Hatim, B. & Mason, I. (1990). *Discourse and the Translator*. Longman.
- Johansson, S. (1992): Times Change, and So Do Corpora. In K. Aijmer and B. Altenberg, (Eds.), *English Corpus Linguistics*, (pp. 305-314). Longman.
- Jones, R. (1998). *Conference Interpreting Explained*. St Jerome.
- Kahane, E. (2000). Thoughts on the quality of interpretation. Available at: <http://aiic.net/page/197/thoughts-on-the-quality-of-interpretation/lang/1>
- Kopczynski, A. (1980). *Conference Interpreting: Some linguistic and communicative problems*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Poznan.
- Krämer, A.K. (2006). *Defining the Elusive: Interpreting Quality Research and Its Pragmatic Relevance*. MA Thesis, Fachhochschule Köln, Institut für Translation und Mehrsprachige Kommunikation. Retrieved from <https://www.dolmetschservice.eu/html/img/pool/Master%20AKKraemer.pdf>
- Lederer, M. (1978). Simultaneous Interpretation — Units of Meaning and other Features. In D. Gerver and H.W. Sinaiko (Eds.), *Language Interpretation and Communication*, (pp. 323-333). Plenum Press.
- Liontou, K. (2012). *Anticipation in German to Greek Simultaneous Interpreting: A Corpus-Based Approach*. PhD dissertation, University of Vienna.
- Mikkelsen, H. (2000). *Introduction to Court Interpreting*. St. Jerome Publishing.
- Monti, C., Bendazzoli, C., Sandrelli, A. & Russo, M. (2005). Studying directionality in simultaneous interpreting through an electronic corpus: EPIC (European Parliament Interpreting Corpus). *Meta* 50(4).
- Napier, J. (2005). Linguistic features and strategies of interpreting: From research to education and practice. In M. Marschark, R. Peterson and E.A. Winston (Eds.), *Sing Language Interpreting and Interpreter Education: Directions for Research and Practice*, Chapter 4. Oxford University Press.
- Napier, J. (2015). Omissions. In F. Pöchhacker, *Routledge Encyclopedia of Interpreting Studies*. (1st ed.), (pp. 289-291). Routledge.
- Orozco-Jutorán, M. (2019). A mixed-methods approach in corpus-based interpreting studies: Quality of interpreting in criminal proceedings in Spain. In Ł. Biel, J. Engberg, R. Martín Ruano, V. Sosoni (Eds.), *Research Methods in Legal Translation and Interpreting: Crossing Methodological Boundaries*, (pp. 152-169). Routledge.
- Ozolins, U. (2015). Ethics and the role of the interpreter. In H. Mikkelsen and R. Jourdenais (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Interpreting*, (pp. 319-336). Routledge.
- Pöchhacker, F. (2002). Researching interpreting quality: Models and methods. In G. Garzone and M. Viezzi (Eds.) *Interpreting in the 21st Century: Challenges and Opportunities*, (pp. 95-106). John Benjamins.
- Pöchhacker, F. (2004). *Introducing Interpreting Studies*. Routledge.
- Pöchhacker, F. (2016). *Introducing Interpreting Studies* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Pym, A. (2008). On omission in simultaneous interpreting: Risk analysis of a hidden effort. In G. Hansen, A. Chesterman and H. Gerzymisch-Arbogast (Eds.), *Efforts and Models in Interpreting and Translation Research: A Tribute to Daniel Gile*, (pp. 83-105). John Benjamins.
- Russo, M., Bendazzoli, C. & Sandrelli, A. (2006). Looking for lexical patterns in a trilingual corpus of source and interpreted speeches: Extended analysis of EPIC (European Parliament Interpreting Corpus). *Forum* 4 (1), 221–254.

- Russo, M., Bendazzoli, C., Sandrelli, A., & Spinolo, N. (2012). The European Parliament Interpreting Corpus (EPIC): Implementation and development. In F.S. Sergio and C. Falbo, *Breaking ground in corpus based interpreting studies*, (pp. 53-90). Peter Lang.
- Sandrelli, A. (2012). Introducing FOOTIE (Football in Europe): Simultaneous interpreting in football press conferences. In F. Straniero Sergio & C. Falbo (Eds.), *Breaking Ground in Corpus-Based Interpreting Studies*, (pp. 119-153). Peter Lang.
- Seeber, K. G. & Zelger, C. (2007). Betrayal – Vice or Virtue? An Ethical Perspective on Accuracy in Simultaneous Interpreting. *Meta* 52(2), 290-298.
- Seleskovitch, D. (1968). *L'Interprète dans les conférences internationales: Problèmes de langage et de communication*. Minard Lettres Modernes.
- Setton, R. (1999). *Simultaneous interpretation: a cognitive-pragmatic analysis*. John Benjamins.
- Setton, R. (2011). Corpus-based Interpreting Studies (CIS): Overview and prospects. In A. Kruger, K. Wallmach and J. Munday (Eds.), *Corpus-based Translation Studies: Research and Applications*, (pp. 33-75). Continuum.
- Shlesinger, M. (1989). Extending the theory of translation to interpretation: norms as a case in point. *Target* 1, 111–115.
- Shlesinger, M. (1997). Quality in simultaneous interpreting. In Y. Gambier, D. Gile and C. Taylor (Eds.), *Conference interpreting: Current trends in research*, (pp. 123-131). John Benjamins.
- Shlesinger, M. (1998). Corpus-based interpreting studies as an offshoot of corpus-based translation studies. *Meta: Translators' Journal*, 43(4), 486-493.
- Spinolo, N. & Garwood, C.J. (2010). To kill or not to kill: Metaphors in simultaneous interpreting. *Forum* 8(1), 181–211.
- Straniero Sergio, F. (2007). *Talkshow Interpreting: La Mediazione Linguistica nella Conversazione Spettacolo*. Edizioni Università di Trieste.
- Sunnari, M. (1995). Processing Strategies in Simultaneous Interpreting: 'saying it all' vs. synthesis. In J. Tammola (Ed.), *Topics in Interpreting Research*. University of Turku.
- Vančura, A. (2017). Speech characteristics as progress indicators in simultaneous interpreting by trainee interpreters. *Govor*, 34(1), 3-32.
- Venuti, L. (2004). *The Translation Studies Reader*. (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Waasaf, N. & Lourdes, M. (2007). Intonation and the structural organization of texts in simultaneous interpreting. *Interpreting* 9(2), 177–198.
- Wadensjö, C. (1998). *Interpreting as Interaction*. Longman.
- Wang, B. (2012). Interpreting strategies in real-life interpreting: Corpus-based description of seven professional interpreters' performance. *Translation Journal*, 16(2). <http://translationjournal.net/journal/60interpreting.htm>

The author

Matei Idu is a PhD candidate conducting a corpus-based study on omissions and information loss in English-Romanian simultaneous conference interpreting. The author has a B.A. level background in Governance, having graduated from the Albert-Ludwig University in Freiburg, Germany, subsequently completing a master's degree in conference interpreting, at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. As a final-year PhD student, he is currently focusing on finishing his study, but in the long term, aims to continue teaching at the university level and bring contributions to the research community of interpreting studies, delving into the complexities of both conference and community interpreting.