

1 Concepts

This initial chapter introduces some basic concepts and distinctions relating to interpreting as the object of interpreting studies. The set of types and terms presented here will serve as a broad foundation for what will be discussed in the course of this book.

The **main points** covered in this chapter are:

- the conceptual roots of ‘interpreting’
- the definition of interpreting
- the relationship between interpreting and translation
- the social settings and interaction constellations in which interpreting takes place
- the major parameters underlying typological distinctions
- the complex interrelationships among various ‘types’ of interpreting
- the mapping of theoretical dimensions and domains of interpreting practice and research

1.1 Conceptual Roots

Interpreting is regarded here as **translational activity**, as a special form of ‘Translation.’ (The capital initial is used to indicate that the word appears in its generic, hypernymic sense.) Interpreting is an ancient human practice which clearly predates the invention of writing – and (written) translation. Many Indo-European languages have words for interpreting, and interpreters, whose etymology is largely autonomous from words for (written) translation. Expressions in Germanic, Scandinavian and Slavic languages denoting a person performing the activity of interpreting can be traced back to Akkadian, the ancient Semitic language of Assyria and Babylonia, around 1900 BCE (see Vermeer 1992: 59). The Akkadian root *targumânu*/*turgumânu*, via an

etymological sideline from Arabic, also gave rise to the ‘autonomous’ English term for interpreter, **dragoman**.

The English word ‘interpreter,’ in contrast, is derived from Latin *interpres* (in the sense of ‘expounder,’ ‘person explaining what is obscure’), the semantic roots of which are not clear. While some scholars take the second part of the word to be derived from *partes* or *pretium* (‘price’), thus fitting the meaning of a ‘middleman,’ ‘intermediary’ or ‘commercial go-between’ (see Hermann 1956/2002), others have suggested a Sanskrit root. Be that as it may, the Latin term *interpres*, denoting someone ‘explaining the meaning,’ ‘making sense of’ what others have difficulty understanding, is a highly appropriate semantic foundation for ‘interpreter’ and ‘interpreting’ in our current understanding.

These etymological roots of the verb ‘**to interpret**’ make for a semantically tense relationship with the terms ‘translation’ and ‘translate’: While one can capitalize on the polysemy of ‘interpret’ to argue for a meaning-based, rather than word-based, conception of Translation (» 3.2.4), it has also been common to stress the distinction between the more general hermeneutic sense and a narrowly construed translational sense of the word. This is particularly striking in the legal sphere, where lawyers view it as their prerogative to ‘interpret’ (the law) and expect court interpreters to ‘translate’ (the language) (» 10.3.2). Rather than semantic quibbling, this constitutes a fundamental challenge to our understanding of what it means to translate and/or interpret, and many parts of this book, beginning with the following section, will be devoted to attempts at finding an appropriate response.

1.2 Interpreting Defined

Within the conceptual structure of Translation, interpreting can be distinguished from other types of translational activity most succinctly by its **immediacy**: in principle, interpreting is performed ‘here and now’ for the benefit of people who want to engage in communication across barriers of language and culture.

1.2.1 *Kade’s Criteria*

In contrast to common usage as reflected in most dictionaries, ‘interpreting’ need not necessarily be equated with ‘oral translation’ or, more precisely, with the ‘oral rendering of spoken messages.’ Doing so would exclude interpreting in signed (rather than spoken) languages (» 1.4.1) from our purview, and would make it difficult to account for the less typical manifestations of interpreting mentioned further down. Instead, by elaborating on the feature of immediacy, one can distinguish interpreting from other forms of Translation without resorting to the dichotomy of oral vs written. This is what Otto **Kade**, a self-taught interpreter and translation scholar at the University of Leipzig (» 2.3.1), did as early as the 1960s. Kade (1968) defined interpreting as a form of Translation in which

- the source-language text is presented only once and thus cannot be reviewed or replayed, and
- the target-language text is produced under time pressure, with little chance for correction and revision.

Kade chose to label the semiotic entities involved in Translation as ‘texts’ (» 7.1), for which one could substitute expressions like ‘utterances’ (in the broad sense), ‘acts of discourse,’ or ‘messages,’ subject to an appropriate definition. Whatever the terms, his definition elegantly accommodates interpreting from, into or between signed languages and also accounts for such variants of interpreting as ‘sight translation’ (» 1.4.2), ‘live subtitling’ or even the on-line (written) translation of Internet chats. This vindicates the general characterization of interpreting as an **immediate** type of translational activity, performed ‘in real time’ for immediate use. A definition relying on Kade’s criteria, foregrounding the immediacy of the interpreter’s text processing rather than real-time communicative use, could thus be formulated as follows:

Interpreting is a form of Translation in which a **first and final rendition in another language** is produced on the basis of a **one-time presentation** of an utterance in a source language.

The criteria of ephemeral presentation and immediate production go some way toward covering our need for conceptual specification. Making our concept of interpreting hinge on the generic notion of Translation, however, leaves us exposed to the more general uncertainty of how to define that term. While the study of interpreting does not presuppose an account of Translation in all its variants and ramifications, our choice to define interpreting as a form of Translation implies that no interpreting scholar can remain aloof from the underlying conceptual issues. As George Steiner (1975: 252) put it, with reference to the German word for ‘interpreter’: “Strictly viewed, the most banal act of interlingual conveyance by a *Dolmetscher* involves the entire nature and theory of translation.”

1.2.2 Interpreting as Translation

Given the expansive and varied theoretical territory of Translation, as covered in reference works like the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (Baker and Saldanha 2009) and the *Handbook of Translation Studies* (Gambier and van Doorslaer 2014), there is a plethora of approaches on which we might draw to enrich our account of interpreting as a form of Translation. Since different scholars will define and characterize their object of study in accordance with their particular aims, experiences and interests, the basic question regarding the nature of Translation has drawn widely discrepant answers. To illustrate the spectrum of choice, let us take a look at four answers to the question ‘What is Translation?’ and consider their theoretical implications.

12 Foundations

Translation is:

- a a process by which a spoken or written utterance takes place in one language which is intended or presumed to convey the same meaning as a previously existing utterance in another language (Rabin 1958)
- b the transfer of thoughts and ideas from one language (source) to another (target), whether the languages are in written or oral form ... or whether one or both languages are based on signs (Brislin 1976a)
- c a situation-related and function-oriented complex series of acts for the production of a target text, intended for addressees in another culture/language, on the basis of a given source text (Salevsky 1993)
- d any utterance which is presented or regarded as a 'translation' within a culture, on no matter what grounds (Toury 1995)

Definition (a) foregrounds the defining relationship between the source and target utterances and stipulates 'sameness of meaning' as an essential ingredient. It also introduces, albeit implicitly, human agents and attitudes in terms of 'intentions' and 'expectations.' Definition (b) describes Translation as a process of 'transfer' acting on 'ideas' in the medium of 'language.' Definition (c) introduces a number of descriptive features, such as 'situation,' 'function,' 'text' and 'culture,' and stresses the target orientation of the translational product. The target orientation is carried to the extreme in definition (d), in which the theorist relinquishes any prescriptive authority and accepts as Translation whatever is treated as such in a given community.

All four definitions accommodate interpreting, but each foregrounds different conceptual dimensions. And whatever is stipulated as an essential feature of Translation (i.e. notions like transfer, ideas, sameness, intention or culture) will carry over to our definition of interpreting and will have to be accounted for in subsequent efforts at description and explanation. We are free, of course, to formulate an altogether different definition of our own, but it would seem foolish to reinvent the wheel of Translation in order to move on with the study of interpreting. We could certainly mine the various definitions of Translation for basic conceptual ingredients, such as

- an **activity** consisting (mainly) in
- the **production of utterances (texts)** which are
- presumed to have a **similar meaning and/or effect**
- as **previously existing** utterances
- in **another language and culture.**

These terms can be adapted and refined in different ways. The notion of 'activity,' for instance, could be specified as a 'service,' possibly qualified as 'professional,' for the purpose of 'enabling communication' and for the benefit of 'clients' or 'users.' Similarly, we could specify 'production' (and 'communication') as taking place in a given 'situation' and 'culture,' and we could

elaborate and differentiate such key concepts as ‘culture,’ ‘language,’ ‘utterance’ and ‘meaning.’ No less significant than terminological refinements, however, are the ways in which our conceptual framework reflects some key areas of theoretical controversy. These include:

- the scope of the interpreter’s task (‘mainly’ production);
- the perspective on the translational process (target-oriented ‘production’ rather than source-dependent ‘transfer’); and
- the normative specification of the translational product (the assumption of ‘similarity’ in ‘meaning’ or ‘effect’).

Whichever of these options one might wish to pursue, the definitional scaffolding set up in these terms should provide sufficient support to interpreting scholars seeking to conceptualize their object of study as a form of Translation. It should be clear, though, even – or especially – in a textbook, that any definition of one’s object of study is necessarily relative to a set of underlying theoretical assumptions. In the words of Gideon Toury (1995: 23):

Far from being a neutral procedure, establishing an object of study is necessarily a function of the *theory* in whose terms it is constituted, which is always geared to cater for certain needs. Its establishment and justification are therefore intimately connected with the *questions* one wishes to pose, the possible *methods* of dealing with the objects of study with an eye to those questions – and, indeed, the kind of *answers* which would count as admissible.

In this relativistic perspective, there can be no such thing as an objective definition fixing, once and for all, the ‘true meaning’ or ‘essence’ of what we perceive or believe something to be like. This ‘non-essentialist,’ postmodern approach to meaning has been reaffirmed by leading scholars as part of the “shared ground” in Translation studies (Chesterman and Arrojo 2000). Its theoretical and methodological consequences will become clear in subsequent sections of this book (» 3.3.1). In the present, foundational chapter, we now return to the concept of interpreting to review ways in which it can be further distinguished with regard to various criteria.

1.3 Settings and Constellations

If we approach the phenomenon of interpreting from a historical perspective, the most obvious criterion for categorization and labeling is the **social context of interaction**, or **setting**, in which the activity is carried out. In its distant origins, interpreting took place when (members of) different linguistic and cultural communities entered into contact for some particular purpose. Apart from such contacts *between* social entities in various **inter-social settings**,

mediated communication is also conceivable *within* heterolingual societies, in which case we can speak of interpreting in **intra-social settings**.

1.3.1 Inter-social and Intra-social Settings

Some of the first mediated contacts between communities speaking different languages will have served the purpose of trading and exchanging goods, of ‘doing business,’ which would give us **business interpreting** as a ‘primeval’ type of interpreting. In one of the earliest publications discussing different types of interpreting, Henri van Hoof (1962) mentions **liaison interpreting** as a form of interpreting practiced mainly in commercial negotiations. More than thirty years later, Gentile et al. (1996) took advantage of the generic meaning of ‘liaison,’ denoting the idea of ‘connecting’ and ‘linking up,’ and extended the term ‘liaison interpreting’ to a variety of interpreting settings across the inter- vs intra-social dimensions.

Where the representatives of different linguistic and cultural communities came together with the aim of establishing and cultivating political relations, they will have relied on mediators practicing what is usually called **diplomatic interpreting**. When relations turned sour, or maybe before they were even pursued, armed conflict would have necessitated mediated communication in a military setting. Such **military interpreting**, as in talks with allies, truce negotiations or the interrogation of prisoners, thus bears a historical relationship to the diplomatic kind.

As societies became increasingly comprehensive and complex, we can conceive of multi-ethnic socio-political entities (such as the empires of Roman times or Spain’s Golden Age) in which communication between individuals or groups belonging to different language communities necessitated the services of interpreters. Following the establishment of institutions for the enforcement of laws and the administration of justice, particularly in newly conquered or colonized territories, interpreters were enlisted to ensure that even those not speaking the language of the authorities could be held to account. Hence, **court interpreting**, for which specific legal provisions were enacted in sixteenth-century Spain, is a classic example of interpreting in an *intra-social* institutional context. In many jurisdictions, what is commonly labeled ‘court interpreting’ includes tasks like the certified translation of documents as well as interpreting in quasi-judicial and administrative hearings. One can therefore distinguish between the broader notion of **legal interpreting**, or **judicial interpreting**, and **courtroom interpreting** in its specific, prototypical setting.

Apart from the legal sphere, interpreting to enable communication between ‘heterolingual’ segments of a multicultural society emerged only more recently in the context of egalitarian states committed to the ‘welfare’ of all their citizens and residents. Once the principle of ‘equal access’ came to be seen as overriding expectations of linguistic proficiency, the intra-social dimension of interpreting became increasingly significant. In the US, for instance, legislation in the

1960s designed to give deaf persons equal access to the labor market gave a strong impetus to the development of interpreting services for users of signed language (» 1.4.1, » 2.1.2). With the focus of such efforts at the ‘social rehabilitation’ of the deaf placed on employment training and education in general, sign language interpreting in educational settings (**educational interpreting**) went on to become one of the most significant types of intra-social interpreting.

The issue of access, first to the labor market and then to a variety of public institutions and social services, was also at the heart of new communication needs arising in the context of (im)migration. While countries like Sweden and Australia responded as early as the 1960s to the demand for interpreting services to help immigrants function in the host society, others have been slow to address such intra-social communication needs. It was only in the 1980s and 1990s, in the face of mounting communication problems in public-sector institutions (healthcare, social services), that ‘interpreting in the community’ acquired increasing visibility. Thus **community interpreting**, also referred to as **public service interpreting** (mainly in the UK), emerged as a wide new field of interpreting practice, with **healthcare interpreting (medical interpreting, hospital interpreting)** and **legal interpreting** (including, among others, police and asylum settings) as the most significant institutional domains.

An interpreting type whose linkage to the intra-social sphere is less obvious is **media interpreting**, or **broadcast interpreting** (often focused on **TV interpreting**), which is essentially designed to make foreign-language broadcasting content accessible to media users within the socio-cultural community. Since spoken-language media interpreting, often from English, usually involves personalities and content from the international sphere, media interpreting appears as rather a hybrid form on the inter- to intra-social continuum. On the other hand, the community dimension of the media setting is fully evident when one considers broadcast interpreting into signed languages. By the same token, court interpreting can also be located in the international sphere, as in the case of war crimes tribunals.

As indicated, the activity of interpreting has evolved throughout history in a variety of settings, from first-time encounters between different tribes to institutionalized inter-social ‘dealings’ as well as in intra-social (‘community’) relations. We can therefore posit a spectrum which extends from inter- to intra-social spheres of interaction and reflects an increasing institutionalization of contacts and communication. Some of the contexts for which there is historical evidence of the interpreting function are illustrated in Figure 1.1 along the inter- to intra-social spectrum. Selected settings are grouped under the catchwords ‘expedition’ (= isolated *inter-social*), ‘transaction’ (= institutionalized *inter-social*) and ‘administration’ (= institutionalized *intra-social*), with the progression from the upper left to the lower right corner of the diagram indicating, ever so roughly, developments and shifts in relative importance over time.

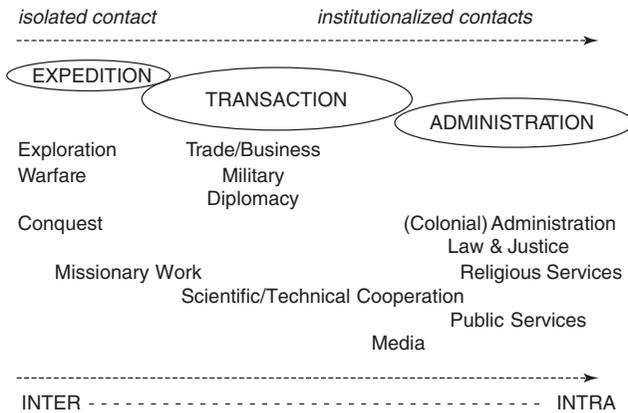


Figure 1.1 Interpreting in different spheres of social interaction

1.3.2 Constellations of Interaction

In addition to the categorization of interpreting types by social context and institutional setting, further significant distinctions can be derived from the situational constellation of interaction. In an early sociological analysis, R. Bruce W. Anderson (1976/2002) modeled the prototypical constellation of interpreting as ‘three-party interaction’ (» 4.3.1), with a (bilingual) interpreter assuming the pivotal mediating role between two (monolingual) clients. This is now commonly referred to as **dialogue interpreting**, highlighting the mode of face-to-face communicative exchange. The term is closely associated, if not synonymous, with what was previously introduced as ‘**liaison interpreting**’ (« 1.3.1). Both of these terms foreground the bilateral nature of communication – in contrast with multilateral communication, as takes place in conferences attended by numerous individuals and representatives of different institutions, hence **conference interpreting**.

Interpreting for international conferences and organizations, in many ways the most prominent manifestation of interpreting in our time, did not emerge as a recognized specialty until the early twentieth century, when official French–English bilingualism in the League of Nations ushered in *de facto* multilingualism in international conferencing. **International conference interpreting**, which was to find its apotheosis in the policy of linguistic equality of the European Union, has spread far beyond multilateral diplomacy to virtually any field of activity involving coordination and exchange across linguistic boundaries. What is distinctive about conference interpreting is that it takes place in a particular ‘ritualized’ format of interaction (‘conference’). It is often set in an international environment, but conference interpreting is also practiced in national contexts and institutions, such as the Belgian or Canadian parliaments.

Combining the distinction based on constellations (formats of interaction) with that of different ‘spheres of social (inter)action’ modeled in Figure 1.1,

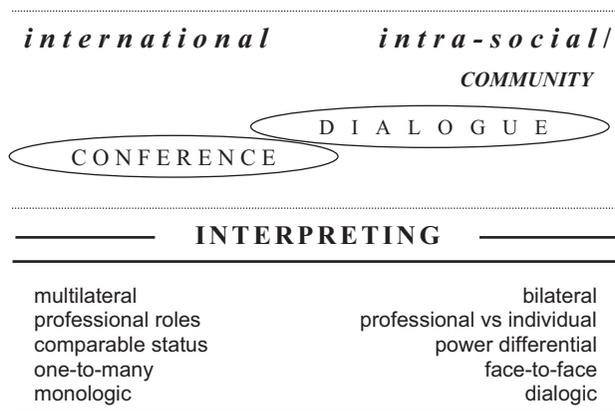


Figure 1.2 Conceptual spectrum of interpreting

we can conceive of interpreting as a conceptual spectrum extending from **international** to intra-social (**community**) interpreting. While it is tempting – and often efficient – to juxtapose conference and community interpreting, it is important to understand the difference between focusing either on the level of socio-cultural communities and their members/representatives or on the format of interaction (e.g. a multilateral conference or face-to-face dialogue). Figure 1.2 attempts to illustrate this dual spectrum.

The main idea is that the two levels allow for multiple combinations, so that dialogue interpreting in an international setting (as in a meeting of two heads of state) is equally accounted for as interpreting in a conference-like community-based setting (e.g. an assembly involving deaf participants). Even so, the descriptors at the bottom of the figure highlight characteristics that are usually or typically associated with either end of the dual spectrum – that is, international conference interpreting and dialogue interpreting in the community.

While the descriptive features are neither exhaustive nor suggestive of all-or-nothing distinctions, they point to some important differences. In particular, the nature of community interpreting is best understood by bearing in mind that one of the parties involved is an **individual** human being, speaking and acting on his or her own behalf.

The dual distinction between ‘international vs community-based’ and ‘conference vs dialogue interpreting’ is only one way of categorizing major (sub)types of interpreting. The following section will introduce additional parameters and interpreting types in order to sharpen awareness of the diversity and complexity of the phenomenon under study.

1.4 Typological Parameters

Apart from the broad classification of interpreting types by settings and constellations, there are additional and rather clear-cut criteria for a more systematic

inventory of types and subtypes of interpreting, among them: language modality, working mode, directionality, technology use, and professional status.

1.4.1 Language Modality

In most of the literature on the subject, the term ‘interpreting’ is used generically as implying the use of spoken languages, traditionally with reference to Western European languages as used in international conferences and organizations. The more explicit term **spoken-language interpreting** gained currency only with the increasing need for a distinction vis-à-vis **sign language interpreting**, popularly known also as ‘interpreting for the deaf.’ Since deaf and hearing-impaired people may actually rely on a variety of linguistic codes in the visual rather than the acoustic medium, it is more accurate to speak of **signed language interpreting** (or **visual language interpreting**). This allows for the significant distinction between interpreting from or into a sign language proper (such as American Sign Language, British Sign Language, French Sign Language, etc.), that is, a signed language which serves as the native language for the **Deaf** as a group with its own cultural identity (hence the distinctive capital initial), and the use of other signed codes, often based on spoken and written languages (e.g. Signed English). Working from and into such secondary (spoken-language-based) sign systems is referred to as **transliteration**, and sign language interpreters or transliterators will be used depending on the language proficiency and preferences of the clients.

Interpreting into a signed language is sometimes referred to, loosely, as ‘signing’ (‘voice-to-sign interpreting’ or ‘sign-to-sign interpreting’), as opposed to ‘voicing’ or ‘voice-over interpreting’ (‘sign-to-voice interpreting’). A special modality is used in communication with deafblind persons, who monitor a signed message, including **fingerspelling**, by resting their hands on the signer’s hands (**tactile interpreting**).

1.4.2 Working Mode

As in the case of language modality, the way in which interpreting was originally practiced did not require terminological qualification until the emergence of a new working mode. It was only in the 1920s, when transmission equipment was developed to enable spoken-language interpreters to work simultaneously, that it became meaningful to distinguish between **consecutive interpreting** (after the source-language utterance) and **simultaneous interpreting** (as the source-language text is being presented). It may be interesting to note that simultaneous interpreting was initially implemented as ‘**simultaneous consecutive**,’ that is, the simultaneous transmission of two or more consecutive renditions in different output languages. Recently, another hybrid form using the same label has become feasible with the use of highly portable digital recording and playback equipment. In this modern form of simultaneous

consecutive (or SimConsec), the interpreter produces a consecutive rendering by playing back and simultaneously interpreting a digital recording of the source speech (» 11.1.2).

Since consecutive interpreting does not presuppose a particular duration of the original act of discourse, it can be conceived of as a continuum which ranges from the rendition of utterances as short as one word to the handling of entire speeches, or more or less lengthy portions thereof, ‘in one go’ (Figure 1.3). Subject to the individual interpreter’s working style – and memory skills – and a number of situational variables (such as the presentation of slides), the consecutive interpretation of longer speeches usually involves **note-taking** as developed by the pioneers of conference interpreting in the early twentieth century (» 2.1.1). Hence, consecutive interpreting with the use of systematic note-taking is sometimes referred to as ‘**classic**’ **consecutive**, in contrast to **short consecutive** without notes, which usually implies a bidirectional mode in a dialogue interpreting constellation.

For sign language interpreters, whose performance in the visual channel leaves little room for activities requiring additional visual attention, note-taking is less of an option, and they work in the short consecutive or, typically, the simultaneous mode. It should be pointed out in this context, however, that the distinction between consecutive and simultaneous interpreting is not necessarily clear-cut. Since neither voice-over interpreting nor signing cause interference in the acoustic channel, sign language interpreters are free to start their output before the end of the source-language message. Indeed, even spoken-language liaison interpreters often give their (essentially consecutive) renditions as simultaneously as possible.

Whereas the absence of acoustic source–target overlap makes simultaneous interpreting (without audio transmission equipment) the working mode of choice for sign language interpreters, spoken-language interpreting in the simultaneous mode typically implies the use of electro-acoustic transmission equipment. Only where the interpreter works right next to one or no more than a couple of listeners can s/he provide a rendition by **whispered interpreting**, or ‘**whispering**’ (also known by the French term *chuchotage*), which is in fact done not by whispering but by speaking in a low voice (*sotto voce*). This is also possible with portable transmission equipment (microphone and headset receivers) as used for guided tours. Nevertheless, simultaneous interpreting with full technical equipment (» 11.1.1) is so widely established today

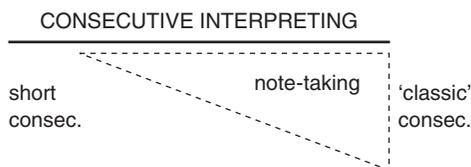


Figure 1.3 Continuum of consecutive interpreting

that the term ‘**simultaneous interpreting**’ (frequently abbreviated to **SI**) is often used as shorthand for ‘spoken-language interpreting with the use of simultaneous interpreting equipment in a sound-proof booth.’

A special type of simultaneous interpreting is the rendition of a written text ‘at sight.’ Commonly known as ‘**sight translation**,’ this variant of the simultaneous mode, when practiced in real time for immediate use by an audience, would thus be labeled more correctly as ‘**sight interpreting**.’ In sight translation, the interpreter’s target-text production is simultaneous not with the delivery of the source text but with the interpreter’s real-time (visual) reception of the written source text. If the interpreter is working ‘at sight’ without the constraints of real-time performance for a (larger) audience, sight interpreting will shade into the consecutive mode or even come to resemble ‘oral translation,’ with considerable opportunity for ‘reviewing’ and correction. A special mode of (spoken-language) simultaneous interpreting is **SI with text** in the booth. Since authoritative input still arrives through the acoustic channel, with many speakers departing from their text for asides or time-saving omissions, this variant of the simultaneous mode is not subsumed under sight interpreting but rather regarded as a complex form of SI with a more or less important sight interpreting component.

Some of these distinctions, which are represented graphically in Figure 1.4, do not hold to the same degree across language modalities. As already mentioned, signing (i.e. voice-to-sign, sign-to-sign or **text-to-sign interpreting**) is feasible in the simultaneous mode without special equipment. In contrast, sign-to-voice interpreting may be performed with or without a microphone and a booth. Simultaneous interpreting equipment is needed only where a monologic source speech in sign language needs to be interpreted into several (spoken) languages, requiring separate audio channels. In text-to-sign interpreting, the interpreter may need to alternate between reception (reading) and

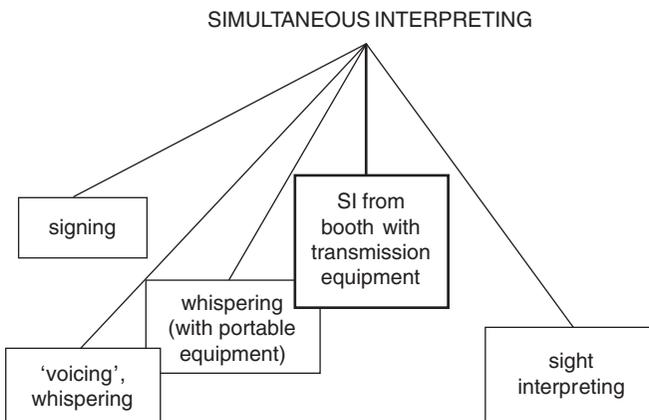


Figure 1.4 Forms of simultaneous interpreting

production (signing), thus bringing sight translation closer to the (short) consecutive mode.

1.4.3 Directionality

While the interpreting process as such always proceeds in one direction – from source to target language – the issue of direction is more complex at the level of the communicative event. In the prototype case of mediated face-to-face dialogue (« 1.3.2, » 4.3.1), the interpreter will work in both directions, that is, ‘back and forth’ between the two languages involved, depending on the turn-taking of the primary parties. Bidirectional interpreting is thus typically linked with the notions of ‘liaison interpreting’ and ‘dialogue interpreting,’ but it may equally occur in conference-type interaction, where interpreters may work in a ‘bilingual booth,’ or are said to provide ‘small retour’ (i.e. interpret questions and comments back into the language chiefly used on the floor).

Although it is common practice in conference interpreting, there is no special label for ‘one-way’ or one-directional interpreting at the level of the communicative event. Relevant distinctions are rather made with reference to the individual interpreter’s combination of working languages, classified by AIIC, the International Association of Conference Interpreters (» 2.1.1), as A, B or C languages (A = native or best ‘active’ language; B = ‘active’ language spoken with near-native proficiency; C = ‘passive’ language allowing ‘complete understanding’). The Western tradition of conference interpreting has favored simultaneous interpreting from B or C languages into an interpreter’s A language. **A-to-B interpreting**, or **retour interpreting**, though widely practiced on ‘local’ (national) markets, has not been equally accepted for simultaneous interpreting in international organizations. In contrast, sign language interpreters, most of whom are not native signers, typically practice simultaneous interpreting as A-to-B interpreting and consider B-to-A, that is, sign-to-voice interpreting, the more challenging direction.

An issue which actually constitutes a parameter in its own right, but can be linked to the present directional context, is the directness with which the source-to-target transfer at a particular communicative event is effected. Where the language combination of the interpreters available does not allow for ‘direct interpreting,’ recourse is made to **relay interpreting**, that is, indirect interpreting via a third language, which links up the performance of two (or more) interpreters, with one interpreter’s output serving as the source for another. Relay interpreting in the simultaneous mode was standard practice in what used to be the Eastern bloc countries, where Russian served as the *pivot* language in the multilingual Soviet Empire. The Russian relay system and its reliance on A-to-B interpreting as the standard directional mode were shunned by proponents of the Western tradition. For some UN and EU working languages, however, the combination of A-to-B

and relay interpreting has played an important role, often with English serving as the *pivot* language, and has become prominent also in the enlarged European Union.

1.4.4 Use of Technology

The use of technical equipment was discussed earlier in connection with simultaneous interpreting (« 1.4.2), where it essentially functions to avoid the mixing of source- and target-language messages in the acoustic channel. Obviously though, electronic transmission systems for sounds and images also serve more generally to overcome spatial distances and ‘connect’ speakers (including interpreters) and listeners who are not ‘within earshot’ or, in the case of signing, within the range of view. Apart from their common use *in situ* (e.g. in conference halls), electro-acoustic and audiovisual transmission systems are therefore employed in particular to reach far beyond a given location. In what is broadly referred to as **remote interpreting** (» 11.2), the interpreter is not in the same room as the speaker or listener. This could mean that the interpreter is in a booth or separate place on the premises, with hardwired connections. Typically, though, greater distances are involved, and bridged with different types of telecommunications equipment.

The oldest form of remote interpreting, proposed as early as the 1950s, is **telephone interpreting (over-the-phone interpreting)**, which became more widely used only in the 1980s and 1990s, particularly in intra-social settings (healthcare, police, etc.). Telephone interpreting is usually performed with standard telecommunications equipment in the bilateral consecutive mode. The emergence of video(tele)phony was of particular significance for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, who now have access in many countries to videoconference-based services known as **video relay service (VRS)**. VRS allows deaf users of sign language to communicate over the phone, the call being mediated by a ‘video interpreter.’

Beyond telephone calls, remote interpreting using videoconference technology can serve international and multilateral conferences as well as community-based institutional encounters. Pioneered in international conference settings several decades ago with satellite links, remote interpreting has recently expanded particularly in community-based domains, such as healthcare and legal settings. This includes encounters involving deaf persons, for which ‘video remote interpreting’ (VRI) is sometimes used as a distinct label.

Terminology in this area has evolved along with technology. One important distinction is made between remote interpreting proper, where the interpreter is not in the same location as the participants in the interaction, and **video-conference interpreting**, where the interpreter is on site together with one of the parties connected via ‘video link.’

No less future-oriented than technology-driven forms of remote interpreting (which, despite complaints about the ‘dehumanization’ of interpreting, continue to rely on especially skilled human beings) are attempts at developing **automatic interpreting** systems on the basis of machine translation software and technologies for speech recognition and synthesis. While such **machine**

interpreting (» 11.3.2) is unlikely to deliver ‘fully automatic high-quality interpreting’ in the near future, advances in mobile and cloud computing have led to impressive progress in the development of ‘speech-to-speech translation’ for certain applications and domains.

1.4.5 Professional Status

Whereas the parameters and interpreting types introduced so far relate to the way in which interpreting is performed, yet another crucial distinction relates to the level of skill and expertise with which the human agent performs the task. Most of the literature on interpreting presupposes a certain – and, more often than not, rather high – professional status of the activity and its practitioners. In other words, the unmarked form of ‘interpreting’ often implies **professional interpreting**, and ‘interpreters’ are regarded as ‘professionals’ with special skills – also in the usage of this book. Historically, it is of course difficult to clearly separate professional interpreting from **non-professional interpreting** or **natural interpreting**, that is, interpreting done by bilinguals without special training for the task.

The issue of “natural translation” has been championed since the 1970s by Canadian translologist Brian Harris, who postulated that “translating is coextensive with bilingualism,” that is, that all bilinguals have at least some translational ability (Harris and Sherwood 1978: 155). Similarly, Toury (1995) put forward the somewhat less radical notion of a “native translator,” stressing the role of bilingualism as a basis for learning how to interpret (and translate). Both proposals point to the merit of studying the process by which a bilingual without special training acquires and applies interpreting skills, and both Harris and Toury agree that there exist socio-cultural translational norms which shape interpreting practices and determine the skill levels required for the activity to be recognized as such.

“The translating done in everyday circumstances by people who have had no special training for it” (Harris and Sherwood 1978: 155) has presumably been common practice throughout history. Today, too, communication with speakers of other languages often remains heavily dependent on the efforts of natural interpreters, the most significant example in community settings being bilingual children, of immigrants or deaf parents, interpreting for their family. On the whole, it was only when task demands exceeded what ‘ordinary’ bilinguals were expected to manage that the job of interpreter was given to people who had special knowledge (of the culture involved or of the subject matter) and skills (in memorizing and note-taking or simultaneous interpreting) as well as other qualifications, such as moral integrity and reliability (» 10.2.1). Even so, the criteria for deciding what or who is professional or not in interpreting are not always hard and fast, and the issue of the professional status of (various types of) interpreting and interpreters needs to be considered within the socio-cultural and institutional context in which the practice has evolved (» 2.1).

1.5 Domains and Dimensions

The typological distinctions introduced in the course of this chapter indicate the multi-faceted nature of interpreting as an object of study. This concluding section will present an overall view of this diversity and complexity by aligning a number of conceptual dimensions and parameters which relate to major domains of interpreting practice. The resulting ‘map’ of the territory of interpreting studies should provide some useful orientation for our subsequent *tour d’horizon* of the field.

The best-known and most influential attempt at charting the territory of the discipline concerned with the study of translational activity is the survey of translation studies by James S. Holmes (1972/2000), usually represented graphically as the ‘map’ of Translation studies (see Toury 1995: 10, Munday 2001: 10). Holmes was not primarily concerned with interpreting, which he posited far down in his branch structure as oral (vs written) human (vs machine) Translation in the “medium-restricted” theoretical domain. To put interpreting more visibly on the map, Heidemarie Salevsky (1993) proposed an analogous branch structure for the discipline of interpreting studies, with theoretical subdomains based on a list of situational variables (see Salevsky 1993: 154): varieties of interpreting (consecutive vs simultaneous); the medium (human, machine, computer-aided interpreting); language combinations; culture combinations; area/institution (interpreting in court, in the media, etc.); text relations (text type, degree of specialization, etc.); and partner relations (source-text producer vs target-text addressee).

In a synthesis of these mapping efforts and the discussion in sections 1.3 and 1.4 above, we can adopt the following set of eight dimensions to map out the theoretical territory of interpreting studies: (1) **medium**; (2) **setting**; (3) **mode**; (4) **languages (cultures)**; (5) **discourse**; (6) **participants**; (7) **interpreter**; and (8) **problem**. These conceptual dimensions are used in Figure 1.5 to illustrate the broad spectrum of phenomena to be covered by theoretical and empirical research on interpreting.

While Figure 1.5 is primarily designed to exemplify the varied nature of interpreting in the horizontal dimensions, the vertical arrangement of the dimensions is such as to suggest major subdomains of interpreting practice and research. Thus, on the left-hand side of the diagram, the features listed for the various dimensions add up to the domain of international conference interpreting, whereas a vertical cross-section on the right-hand side suggests some of the main features of community-based interpreting. Given the many facets of the diverse phenomena to be covered, the diagram cannot amount to a combinatorial map of features. On the whole, however, the interplay of the first seven dimensions serves to highlight some of the key factors in the various prototypical domains. As indicated by the use of dotted lines, the problem-oriented dimension shown at the bottom of Figure 1.5 represents not a continuum of descriptive features but a set of examples of major research concerns to date, as explored more fully in Part II of this book.

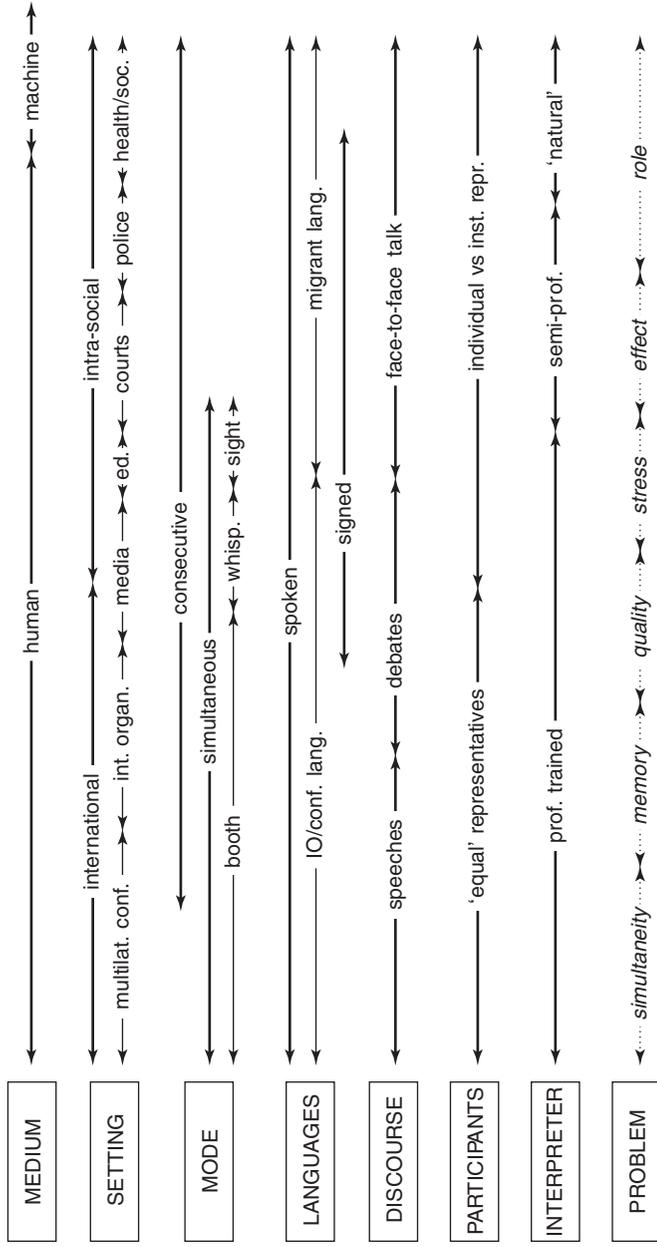


Figure 1.5 Domains and dimensions of interpreting theory

Summary

This chapter has laid the conceptual foundations for our survey of interpreting studies by defining the object of study and reviewing its typological ramifications. Acknowledging a basic dependence on theoretical approaches to the generic concept of Translation, interpreting was characterized as an *immediate* form of translational activity, performed for the benefit of people who want to engage in communication across barriers of language and culture. Defined as a form of Translation in which a first and final rendition in another language is produced on the basis of a one-time presentation of a source-language utterance, the concept of interpreting was differentiated according to *social* contexts and institutional *settings* (inter-social vs intra-social settings) as well as situational *constellations* and formats of *interaction* (multilateral conference vs face-to-face dialogue). In addition to the continuum between the prototypical domains of *international conference interpreting* and *community-based dialogue interpreting*, including *court or legal interpreting* and *healthcare interpreting*, a more detailed typology of interpreting practices was drawn up by applying the parameters of language modality (*signed- vs spoken-language interpreting*), working mode (*consecutive vs simultaneous interpreting*), directionality (*bilateral, B/C-to-A, A-to-B and relay interpreting*), use of technology (*remote interpreting, machine interpreting*), and *professional status* (*'natural' vs professional interpreting*). Finally, a conceptual orientation to the complex interplay of domains and dimensions was offered in the form of a 'map' of the theoretical territory of research on interpreting.

Sources and Further Reading

On the terms 'interpreter' and 'interpreting' in English and other languages, see Mead (1999) and Pöchhacker (2010a) as well as INTERPRETING in Pöchhacker (2015). There are few publications specifically devoted to a comprehensive conceptual analysis of interpreting. The pioneering "taxonomic survey" of interpreting put forward by Harris in the mid-1990s has remained unpublished. For typological discussions with reference to community interpreting, see e.g. Gentile et al. (1996) and Roberts (1997). For reference, see the articles under the headings of *MODES* and *SETTINGS* in Pöchhacker (2015). Most books recommended for a deeper understanding of various domains of professional practice focus only on a particular type of interpreting. These include: for conference interpreting, Herbert (1952), Seleskovitch (1978a), Jones (1998); for court interpreting, González et al. (2012), Laster and Taylor (1994); for community interpreting, Hale (2007); and for signed language interpreting, Frishberg (1990), Stewart et al. (1998). Chapter-length accounts of

“Conference Interpreting,” “Court Interpreting,” “Healthcare Interpreting,” “Signed Language Interpreting,” etc. can be found in *The Routledge Handbook of Interpreting* (Mikkelsen and Jourdenais 2015).

Suggestions for Further Study

- What are the etymology and current meaning of words for ‘interpreter’ and ‘interpreting’ in other languages?
- How is the distinction between ‘translation’ and ‘interpreting’ made in other languages, in dictionaries, in academic writings and in the profession(s)?
- Do other languages offer a lexical distinction between ‘interpreting,’ or ‘interpretation,’ in the translational sense and in the sense of exegesis or explanation?
- What forms and types of interpreting are conceptually salient in other languages and national contexts, and how are they differentiated and interrelated?