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Dialogue Interpreting and the Distribution of Responsibility

Abstract

The sense-making work carried out by anyone in interaction can be described as based on different aspects of meaning, basically the propositional meaning of talk and the interactional or situated meaning of words spoken. Moreover, in a conversation involving three or more persons, sense is arguably made also on the basis of the *participation framework* (Goffman, 1981), continuously negotiated in and by talk. This composes a theoretical platform for the analysis of the distribution of responsibility in an interpreter-mediated encounter; responsibility for the substance and for the progression of talk. The paper suggests an *interactionistic, non-normative, dialogical* approach to studies of interpreter-mediated talk for a deepened, developed understanding of the interpreter's role in face-to-face interaction.

0. Introduction

This paper will discuss the distribution of responsibility in face-to-face interpreting. It is *not* an effort to normatively define the responsibility of the interpreter in general, or in interpreting of a particular kind. We will look at existing norms, but leave aside for the moment the discussion about which norms could or should be valid for performers of face-to-face interpreting. Instead, this paper aims at exploring the responsibility of an interpreter as *implicated in actual interaction*. The interesting thing about responsibility then is how it is distributed in and through talk. And in order to be able to study this phenomenon, it is necessary to set focus on the interpreter-mediated *encounter as a whole*. This situation can be seen as a special case of three-party talk or of

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multi-party interaction (cf. Keith, 1984, Knapp-Potthoff & Knapp, 1987). Let us look at *interpreting as interaction*.²

1. Aim

My aim here is two-fold. On the one hand I want to shed light on how, in a two-language encounter, responsibility for the progression and the substance of interaction is distributed in and through talk. On the other hand, in doing this, I want to point at some theoretical implications of applying a *interactionistic, non-normative, dialogical* approach to studies of interpreter-mediated interaction. Since this is not a mainstream theoretical stance within interpretation studies, I will devote some space to make a few important distinctions.

2. Theoretical preliminaries - interpreting as inter-activity

It is a trend in translation studies to focus not only on the results of translators' activity, but on the activity as such. Nevertheless, most studies are concerned with how the individual translator performs the *translation activity* (for instance, more or less adequately). The same thing could be argued for many studies of interpreters and interpreting. The interpreting individual and her interpreting activity is being explored as such. The focus can be set on interpreting as the individual interpreter's cognitive ability and skill. An alternative approach is to focus more on interpreting as a linguistic and social competence, as suggested by for instance Anderson (1976), Harris (1981), and Berk-Seligson (1990). Depending on the questions we wish to raise we will see interpreting as social action or as social inter-action. Potentially, the scope of the theoretical frame will provide different analytical implications.

Seen from an interactionistic perspective, the interpreter takes part in a *social situation*, where she potentially has a unique possibility to

² This paper condenses some central ideas presented in my Ph.D. dissertation (Wadensjö, 1992), *Interpreting as Interaction*. Earlier versions were presented at the DAAD symposium "Dolmetschen als interculturelles Mitteln", Bayreuth, July 1993, at the research colloquium "Information und Repräsentation", Hildesheim, November, 1993, and at a TÖI seminar (Institute for Interpretation and Translation Studies), Stockholm University, December, 1993. My journey to Bayreuth was supported by a travel grant from the Swedish Institute.

understand everything said and therefore a unique possibility to overview and coordinate interaction. Given that we choose this perspective, and take into consideration not only the interpreter, but the interpreter-mediated encounter as a whole, we have to consider (at least) two important aspects of the interpreter's activity. The interpreter's discourse has to be analysed both as *relaying or translating* and *as coordinating or mediating*. These aspects are *simultaneously present, and one aspect does not exclude the other*. As a matter of fact, these aspects condition each other. Thus, to make this clear: On a certain level it is not an empirical question *if* the interpreter is a translator or a mediator, or a relayer or a coordinator; she is both. Given that interpreting is regarded as interaction, the empirical issue concerns how the interpreter's relaying and coordinating take shape in practice, under different situational conditions.

Research on interpreting concentrating on the interpreter's activity of translating is often *normative* due to the simple fact that when something is identified as non-translating, it is by definition against the norm stating that interpreters should just translate. Combine this with a *monological* view on language and language use, and their non-translating will be described as individual deficiencies or failures.

2.1. Monologism and dialogism

Traditionally linguistics and the language sciences work with the theoretical model of language as an *abstract, normative system of linguistic items*. According to such a model, words and expressions *own* a certain meaning. It is as if they have in and by themselves a certain meaning glued on to them, just by having a given place in a particular language system. What has developed for instance as applied linguistics, cognitive science and communication studies work with alternative models of language. The object in focus is language use, which is seen as processes or practices, inter-individual or intra-individual. And the different perspectives imply different views on the question of how or where meaning is created, for instance, within the individual mind or in the situation between people.

In preparing for a communicative study of dialogue interpreting it is important to distinguish between two major alternative models of communication, namely the transfer model and the interactionistic model. The transfer model, also labelled the conduit model (Reddy,

1979) has a strong impact on the everyday life understanding of interpretation, including sign language interpretation (cf. Roy, 1989). It implies conceptualizing interpreting as a *unidirectional process of transfer*, from one language to another, or one text to another. The conduit model is *monological*. Language use is regarded from the perspective of the speaker. The meaning of specific words and utterances are seen as resulting from the speakers intentions or strategies, while co-present people are seen as recipients of the units of information prepared by the speaker. It is as if while creating meaning, the individual speaker is thought away from her interactional context and thought into a social vacuum.

An interactionistic approach implies that language is viewed and explored as a *historical and social phenomenon*, continuously reproduced and recreated by being used (Bakhtin, 1986a, b). The use of language is regarded as *social activities*, connected to different genres and layers of contexts. In contrast to the transfer model, the social interactionistic model is *dialogical*. According to this model, meaning is conceptualized as co-constructed *between* speaker and hearer(s) *in interaction*. Meanings can thus not be described entirely in terms of individuals' intentions. On the contrary, the sense each individual makes of specific words and expressions, of what is heard and said, is understood to be drawn partly from the already known use of these words, partly from the interlocutor's knowledge about the ongoing practice where a particular utterance is voiced and partly from the interlocutors' actions in interaction. The potential meaning we adhere to words and phrases is matched against time, place, social situations and thereby associated communicative genres. Talk provides in itself a social context to ongoing talk. The different epistemologies, monologism and dialogism, imply different units of analysis: "Whilst monologism assumes individuals and societies (cultures) to be analytical primes, dialogism takes *actions and interactions*, e.g. the discursive practices, *in their contexts* as basic units" (Linell, 1994:11) (cf. also Holquist, 1990, Marková & Foppa, 1990).

3. Practice and norms

Being myself a state-authorized Swedish interpreter (between Russian and Swedish) I know the general norms of interpreting. We may note

that these normative expectations concerns me *both* as a translator (just translate, translate everything, translate adequately) and as a person with a position in between two parties, i.e. as a mediator (be neutral). And, as most interpreters, I also know that practice may confront me with dilemmas and give me reason to ask the question: How do I actually go about translating everything, just translating, translating adequately and being neutral? In practice?

The practice I have in mind is work within social welfare, court-rooms, the police and in hospitals. The Swedish community interpreter, what we have called “Dialogue Interpreter” (Sw: *dialogtolk*) (Linell *et al*, 1992), enjoys a professional status comparable to community interpreters in countries like Australia, and comparable to professional sign language interpreters in a growing number of countries. There are professional organizations and state certification for those who qualify (which has to be renewed every fifth year). There are also other institutionalized quality tests, and the interpreter’s job is regulated by an official code of conduct. This does not mean to say that everyone working as an interpreter in the public sphere in Sweden does this for a living, or are state certified. Nevertheless, those who do work with social service as interpreters are in principle expected to subscribe to the official ethical code. The interpreter is hired not by one person or a company, but by the society, and is paid by the state or the municipality, just like other representatives of public organisations. (Still it remains to be explored, though, where, when and how individual interpreters’ loyalties are formed, in the professional organization of interpreters, at the places of work, in groups of immigrants and refugees etc.).

As Goffman (1961) suggests, exploring a social role, you naturally look at the normative role expectations associated with this particular role. However, this will give you information only on *one* aspect. Ideas about normativity towards which an interpreter orients herself when working is *one* thing. How her social role is actually *lived*, i.e. carried out in practice, is another thing. Moreover, we have to consider not just one person’s normative expectations. When studying a social role, the *constellation* of people is the basic analytical unit, *not* the individual. In exploring the role of dialogue interpreter one has to see her in relation to those *others* confirming or rejecting her in this role. You will also have to consider that individuals are *multiple-role performers* (Goffman, 1961:142). The interpreter can be confirmed or not in her role as

interpreter as well as in possible other social roles (such as woman, compatriot, foreigner, well-educated, etc.).

It appears that an interpreter's typical self-image is deeply influenced by the partly codified *normative role*, to use a concept from Goffman (1961), that is, what a performer of the role normally thinks she ought to do when she does a good job. One frequently used metaphor for the interpreter's job is the copying-machine. Another is the 'telephone': the interpreter is thought of, and thinks of herself as a channel, an instrument *conveying* information, someone who affects the words, messages, and utterances of the monolingual parties in a merely technical sense (cf. the conduit model discussed above). Judging from interviews and informal talks, active interpreters together with their instructors are not the only ones to express their understanding of an interpreter's work by these metaphors. So are many employers. This does not exclude that interpreters constantly and knowingly break the rules, and constantly experience a need to legitimate their rule-violating behaviour.

The following would be a normative account of a conversation in which an interpreter (I) and two monolingual parties talk, i.e. a professional (P) speaking the majority language, and a lay person (L) speaking a minority language:

- P: Utterance 1 (in the majority (P's) language)
 I: Utterance 1' (= rendition of U1 in the minority language)
 L: Utterance 2 (in the minority (L's) language)
 I: Utterance 2' (= rendition of U2 in P's language)
 P: Utterance 3 (in P's language)
 I: Utterance 3' (=rendition of U3 in L's language)
 etc.

We have already mentioned that, from a normative point of view, the interpreter is expected to just translate, translate everything and translate adequately what the primary parties say. This norm concerns the dialogue interpreter as a *translator*. Still the official norm concerns the interpreter also as a person with a position in between. As such she is supposed to be neutral. In the above schema this is visible in the fact that the interpreter is expected to take every second turn at talk.

4. At the policestation

Let us keep this schematical model in mind and look at a piece of authentic discourse. Our question about the distribution of responsibility will be considered in relation to a short extract of interpreted talk, drawn from an encounter at a Swedish policestation. A Russian-speaking woman, Alisa, has been called to the immigration department at a Swedish policestation. She is interviewed about an application for residence permit in Sweden. She meets Peter, a policeofficer. His job is to write a report, on the basis of which her case will be decided. He is typing this report while interviewing her. The interlocutors are assisted by an interpreter - Ilona. We come in when the officer asks questions about Alisa's future plans.

We will start by looking at what the interpreter says. In principle she says what the others say, hence this should be a way for us of getting the content of the encounter. In the real communication situation the interpreter spoke Russian and Swedish. Here all utterances are roughly translated into English (below each utterance).³

³ Transcription conventions:

Underlinings in the extracts indicate simultaneous talk.

, = "continuing intonation" (a prosody-shift after a unit of talk indicating that it is not completed and/or that the speaker does not want to drop the turn).

. = "terminating intonation" (indicating that the speaker is prepared to relinquish the turn, or, at least, that an informationally completed unit of talk has been issued)

? = "questioning intonation"

- = sudden cut-off of the current sound.

... = "open-ended intonation" (utterance fading out with an ambiguous intonation terminal)

: = the sound just before has been noticeably lengthened.

(.) = a short silence (micro-pause).

boldface = emphasis, which may be signaled by increases in pitch and/or amplitude.

◦ ◦ (framing part of an utterance) = pronounced in *sotto voce*

(Extract from G 22:4)

Peter = policeofficer, Alisa = applicant, Ilona = interpreter

Peter: 1. (types for 15 s.) *mm. jag vill att du... eem... spekulerar litegrann. om... hur (.) hur du kan använda din utbildning- ditt yrke i Sverige. vet du nå't sånt? o- om du får tillstånd i Sverige. (starts typing)*

(types for 15 s.) *mm. I want you to... erm... speculate a little. if... how (.) how you can use your education- your profession in Sweden. do you know anything about that? i- if you get a permit in Sweden. (starts typing)*

Ilona: 2. z [jæ xnj, s ds:: gjlevfkb d ckel j njv7 rfr ds cvj;tnt bçgjknøjdfnm ødj. ghj- ghjatccb. d Odtwbq pltcn7 tckb ds gjkexbnt hfphitybt yf gjcnjzyyt ;bntkmcndj7

I want you to:: think aloud about. how you can use your pro- profession in Sweden here. if you get a permanent residence permit.

Alisa: 3. ye777 z levf. xnj777 vyt yflj gthtæxbrncz7
well... I think that... I have to retrain myself

Ilona: 4. *jag tror att jag måste skola om mig.*
I think that I have to retrain myself.

Alisa: 5. ye d cvsçkt njuj xnj z dj gthds[yt pyf. idtlerjuj zpsrf6
well in the sense that I for one thing don't know the Swedish language,

Ilona: 6. *med tanke på att jag inte kan svenska.*
bearing in mind that I don't know Swedish.

Alisa: 7. ye b yfdthyj pltcn vtlbwbyf dc/-nfrb yt nfr hfplbnf rfr e yfc d Cjdtncrjv Cj.pt7
gj=njve777

well and probably here Medicine after all is not so developed as ours, in the Soviet Union. that's why...

Ilona: 8.	<i>å... med tanke på att... e::: medicinsk utveckling är inte på samma nivå som i Sovjet.</i> <i>and... bearing in mind that... e::: medical development is not at the same level as in the USSR.</i>
Alisa: 9.	ytn7 ye d cvsckt- gj=njve- f gj cgtwnfknyjcnb freithrj-ubytrjkju6 z levf. xnj b pltam jyb nht,e.ncz7 dhfxb7 no. well in the sense- that's why- and my specialty is obstetrics ⁴ , I think that here these are also needed. doctors.
Ilona: 10.	<i>och e::: mitt yrke är... barnmorska gynekolog och det tror jag nog man behöver såna här med.</i> and er::: my profession is... midwife gynaecologist and these I would think are also needed here.
Peter: 11.	<i>jaha. skola om sig. ja ja. okej. du- du menar att skaffa dig kunskaper i svenska eller... komplettera? eller... e::: jag hänger upp mig på uttrycket skola om sig. då tänker jag på nåt helt annat yrke. °kan vi utreda det. (.) bara lite.°</i> aha. retrain oneself. yes yes. okay. you- you mean to get some knowledge in Swedish or... do a refresher course? or... er::: I have problems with the expression retrain oneself. then I think about an entirely different profession. °can we clear this up. (.) just a little.°
Ilona: 12.	<i>a näe det- det var... mitt fel.</i> a no it- it was... my fault.
Peter: 13.	mm, mm,
Ilona: 14.	<i>de- det var just det hon tänkte på.</i> thi- this was just what she had in mind.

From Ilona we learn that the officer says: “I want you to::: think aloud about. how you can use your pro- profession in Sweden here. if you get a permanent residence permit” (2). The woman responds: “I think that I have to retrain myself” (4). She fills in: “bearing in mind that I don’t

⁴ lit:=midwife gynaecologist.

know Swedish” (6). And she continues: “And... bearing in mind that... er::: medical development is not at the same level as in the USSR” (8). She goes on: “And er::: my profession is... midwife gynaecologist and these I would think are also needed here” (10). And then comes: “Oh no it- it was... my fault”, “thi- this was just what she had in mind” (12) and (14).

It seems here as if Ilona takes on responsibility for some kind of interactional problem. Comparing (12) and (14) with (11) and (13) we see that they are not renditions of the preceding utterances. You could argue that this interpreter simply made a mistake. If you relate her talk with the norm stating that interpreters should just translate, this would perhaps be what you would conclude. You might also claim that she was breaking the norm of neutrality, protecting or preventing Alisa from speaking for herself and the officer from addressing Alisa. But if we want to understand *what* the interpreter did, and the *interactional mechanisms* behind this, we have to apply another approach.

5. Participation framework and responsibility

We have pointed at one interesting duality in an interpreter’s job. She has the mandate to relay and to coordinate the others’ talk. Another duality lies in the fact that it is her job to both speak for others and listen on others’ behalf. Although it is often overlooked in scholarly discussions, listening is obviously an important constituent of conversation. If interpreting a speech of an orator at a rostrum implies little or no doubt from the point of view of the interpreter that the original(s) indeed is (are) intended to have the status of original(s), the dialogue interpreter, the interpreter on duty in conversation, is constantly confronted with assessing how, and by whom, interlocutors intend their utterances to be understood. In the course of interaction, the dialogue interpreter at work, more or less consciously, evaluates interlocutors’ *speakership and listenership*; how the parties relate to the conversation. In Goffmanian terminology she monitors and contributes to the *participation framework* (Goffman, 1981:226, cf. also Wadensjö, 1992).

The organization of talk accomplished in interaction could be described in terms of interlocutors’ distribution of *speaker-hearer roles*, or altering between different *footings*. The distribution of speaker-hearer roles may actually determine whether the monolingual

parties' contributions end up as off-the-record, or as on-the-record talk. We need to expand briefly on Erving Goffman's analytical model. Goffman states:

When a word is spoken, all those who happen to be in the perceptual range of the event will have some sort of participation status relative to it (Goffman, 1981:3).

To have some sort of participation status is thus the same as possibly being ascribed and/or taking on some sort of hearer's role. If you are the one who speaks the word, you will simultaneously take on and be ascribed also a speaker's role. The idea is that listening and speaking are activities that condition each other. They do not exclude each other. As a speaker, says Goffman, you have different modes of relating to what you say, different *production formats (animator, author and principal)*. This means that by talking you can display different *aspects of self* and thereby take and/or are given more or less responsibility for the substance and the progression of interaction.

- 1) You can be seen and/or regard yourself as an *animator* of other's words. The authority and the responsibility behind what you say is given to someone else/taken to be someone else's. You are just "the sounding box".
- 2) You can be seen and/or regard yourself as an *author*, i.e. you might ascribe the ultimate responsibility and authority behind your utterance to someone else, but you take on and/or are ascribed responsibility for composing the utterance.
- 3) You can be taken as and/or take yourself as a *principal* of an utterance, i.e. be the *animator* and the *author* of it without ascribing to someone else the ultimate responsibility for what you say, and/or you would be understood as carrying the responsibility and authority for what you say.

In the same way as we can distinguish between different ways of relating as a speaker to a word spoken, we could distinguish between different ways of relating as listeners to what is said in encounters to which we are present, between different *reception formats* (for a detailed discussion, see Wadensjö, 1992:117-125). The idea is that you can determine from the way a person is listening that she takes more or less responsibility for the progression and the substance of common

interaction. Thus, a simple parallel to Goffman's suggested *production format* would include the following three concepts: *reporter*, *recapitulator* and *responder*

- 1) You can listen in order to be able to repeat exactly, word by word; I have called this to listen as a *reporter*.
- 2) You can listen in order to be able to summarize; listen as a *recapitulator*.
- 3) You can listen in order to be able to contribute an adequate continuation; listen as a *responder*.

Note that one way of listening does not exclude the other, but the way in which a person responds to an utterance in interaction indicates what kind of listening is predominant, or what kind of listening the person in question focuses on.

5.1. The encounter in retrospect

My interest for the piece of discourse presented in the extract above was originally raised by the interpreter. On that day at the police station, when the interview had ended, and she and the researcher, i.e. myself, were waiting for the next person to be interviewed she said to me: *Äsch, gthtexbmcz - det är väl omskola, skola om sig?* ("Damn, gthtexbmcz ("to retrain (oneself)") - it is retrain, to retrain oneself, isn't it?") "Yes, but you can take it differently" I suggested. "Yes, but you see how fast I am backing out" Ilona says, quoting herself, "yes, yes, it's my fault' - it wasn't my fault! It's so typical you know. I get so irritated." (G22:18).

These comments raise a number of interesting questions. Ilona, in retrospect, saw it as a mistake to admit guilt when she actually had translated correctly the word "retrain oneself". Who was to blame then? What for? We have a general tendency in interaction to attribute guilt to someone in particular when misunderstandings are discovered or feared. This is due to the limited perspective of individual actors in the here-and-now situation. In a detailed analysis of discourse however, it is possible to discover the complexities of connections between interlocutors' contributions (cf. Linell, 1992).

Let us think about the situation quoted in another way; the interlocutors did neither the right nor the wrong thing, but something,

which at a particular point in time gained a certain communicative sense. Alisa expressed herself in a rather unclear way. She used a word *grtħtɛxɔncz* (“to retrain (oneself)”), and at first you could think she displayed an interest in, or openness to the idea of trying a new profession, and after a few turns at talk it seems clear that what she meant to say was that she wanted to learn Swedish, but that she assumed her present professional competence to be quite valuable in the new Swedish context. At least that is how the officer understood her. We can see from the dialogue, in (11), that he took notice of a possible idea of changing profession, but this idea leaves no sign in his written report. We also know that this understanding was made explicit only when the officer’s report was read aloud at the end of the encounter for the applicant to approve of or correct. Here, when Ilona says: “that’s what she meant” (14), there is no more discussion on this issue.

Meanwhile, Ilona’s post-interview comment suggests that at first she had believed her choice of terms in Swedish, *skola om mig* (“retrain myself”) (4) was faulty; that it does not correspond to the Russian expression Alisa had used. However, she begins to doubt that she was wrong, and she is confirmed in her belief that she had indeed made a correct interpretation of *grtħtɛxɔncz* (“to retrain (oneself)”). The two expressions, in Swedish and Russian respectively, could be said to be equivalent. They have overlapping, even if not identical, meaning potentials in the different languages and cultures. Realizing this, Ilona’s grounds for self-blame, as it were, disappear. Still, she is angry with herself. My point is that the reason for this could be described in terms of her being tempted or forced into alternating between different *footings*, different *speaker-hearer roles*.

What we see is an example of one of these typical dilemmas of the dialogue interpreter’s practice. The discrepancy between the concepts for “retrain (oneself)” in standard Russian and Swedish respectively function both as a resource and as a trouble source in two-language interaction. The interpreter is expected/takes it upon herself to provide a translation to *vyt yflj grtħtɛxɔncz* (“I have to retrain (myself)”) at a point in time when Alisa is in the process of formulating an answer. Later, when Alisa specifies the Russian expression in a somewhat non-standard way, the particular expression Ilona has provided as a translation, *skola om sig*, turns out to be a bit out of place.

As a general point we may note that the interpreter, to a considerable extent, must treat fragments of interaction as decontextualized wholes. In terms of participation framework, when assuming the recipient role of *reporter*, her understanding has a local, single-original-to-single-rendition (turn-to-turn) basis.

In the literature on social interaction, partial repetition of prior talk is assumed to occur in particular sequence-types. Among these are “other-initiated repair” (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977), speaker’s disagreement with prior speaker’s self-deprecations (Pomerantz, 1984:83-84), and with the activity of arguing (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1987). All these findings might add to the explanation of why Ilona in this particular situation takes on a personal responsibility; that she aligns as a *responder* to what the officer says, in (11), providing a direct response and thus relating as an *author* to her own utterance without ascribing to Alisa the principalship (12).

5.2. The encounter revisited

Let us look again at Peter’s utterance in (11) above. He starts “aha. retrain oneself. yes yes. okay.”, which sounds like a confirmation, indicating that the prior utterance(-s) are understood. Then he draws attention back to what is actually meant by what is said: “you- you mean to get some knowledge of Swedish or... do a refresher course? or... er::: I have problems with the expression retrain oneself”. He seems to react to what to him might appear as inconsistency in terms and calls attention to what has actually been said. In other words, Peter initiates a negotiation of the meaning of *skola om sig* (“retrain (oneself)”), re-using the formulation given by Ilona (naturally enough, as he does not speak or understand Russian).

In utterance (14) Ilona relates as an *author* to another’s words. She gives voice to the applicant, providing a summarizing (even if quite vague) rendition of Alisa’s utterance(-s): *de- det var just det hon tänkte på.* (“*thi- this was just what she had in mind.*”). Simultaneously, the interpreter covers up for the expression *skola om sig* (“retrain oneself”), relating to it as something she was herself responsible for, rather than ascribing responsibility for it to Alisa. Interestingly enough, her alternating between footings corresponds to the officer’s alternating between footings. Peter finally adds “can we clear this up”, in (11). A

certain change in how he relates to his interlocutors is displayed here, first and foremost by a change of tone in his voice. If the first part of his utterance could well be understood as relating to Ilona as *recipient-reporter* (i.e. Alisa is referred to in his “you mean” etc.), the end of it, in a lower voice, sounds rather as if relating to the interpreter as a *responder* or *recapitulator*, i.e. as someone included in his pronoun of address (“can we clear this up”). A change of footing is cued by voice characteristics (cf. Gumperz’ (1982) notion of contextualization cues). Understood like this, the officer projects to Ilona a responder’s listenership in relation to what she hears, and therefore also an author’s speakership in relation to what she is to say in her subsequent utterance. Ilona, in turn, aligns to such a footing, addressing not the applicant but the officer. Peter’s contribution opened up first for one, later for another possibility. This change in Ilona’s footing is furthermore supported by what Peter implicitly draws attention to, finally adding in an even lower voice, “just a little.”, in (11). The interpreter is hereby reminded of the time limits to the encounter in question, typically set by an institution of this kind.

What is clear from the excerpt above is that Alisa has difficulty in expressing herself on a particular issue initiated by the officer; that she wants to provide an answer, but starts to do this without being sure what she actually wants to say. This is a dilemma she has to face as an applicant of residence permit. She is anxious to make a good impression, which includes, if possible, avoiding saying anything that could put her in a bad position. In this particular case, the applicant seems to start out by displaying a wish, a preparedness or a willingness to change professions. On second thoughts, she tries instead to remedy the impression the first utterance may have brought about. It may have come to Alisa’s mind that presenting herself as a person having this attitude to her professional qualifications would perhaps harm her chances as applicant for a residence permit in Sweden. It could be added here that according to traditional Soviet law, a person’s right to settle in a particular place is/was closely related to her enrolment at a workplace.

We may further note that Alisa’s statements concerning the advancement of medicine in the USSR compared to the Swedish standards (“well and probably here medicine after all is not so developed as ours, in the Soviet Union. that’s why...”) (7) is relayed

somewhat more vaguely by Ilona (“and... bearing in mind that... er::: medical development is not at the same level as in the USSR.”) (8). Moderating Alisa’s statement Ilona potentially acts to save the interlocutors’ faces. Simultaneously she sees to it that communication continues smoothly on a focused issue (i.e. the applicant’s view on her Soviet education in a Swedish context). At this point she is teaming up with Alisa (which does not exclude an alliance with Peter). Intuitively or not, Ilona in this way protects also *her own* working conditions, in between the other two, keeping alive the primary interactants’ mutual interest in sustaining a common activity, namely talking.

The situation analysed seems to touch the heart of the dialogue interpreter’s dilemma, inherent in her normative role as faithful translator and neutral coordinator. It is possible that Alisa is aware of the fact that it has a root in her saying *vyt yflj gthtexbrmcz* (“I have to retrain myself”), or in her feeling of insecurity. Perhaps this is completely obscure to her. Be that as it may, but a feeling of awkwardness definitely comes over Ilona and her use of the expression *gthtexbrmcz/skola om sig* (“retrain (onself)”). One should note however, that this becomes manifest only when Peter brings up the meaning of the expression as the focused object of conversation.

The fact that Peter ascribes to Ilona a *responder’s* role, and that she aligns to such a position in relation to his utterance, means that she changes her relationship to the expression discussed. Where Ilona had once related to *skola om sig* (“retrain (onself)”) as an *animator* of another’s words, she is later ascribed and/or takes on the role of someone *more* responsible for the words used, due to fluctuations of participation framework. It could be noted that, throughout the encounter, Peter largely asked questions by consistently addressing the applicant directly, and not by addressing the interpreter. As he explained it in a post-interview, he consciously followed the recommended way of talking through an interpreter. Nevertheless, there were moments like the one illustrated above, where a momentary alternating of *footings* was displayed, sometimes, as in (11), within one and the same utterance.

As is shown, these alterings of speaker-hearer roles are the result of participants’ joint activity. In a normative sense the interpreter is a non-participant in interaction, but in practice her involvement may be

continuously fluctuating. A dialogue interpreter's ability to keep in mind different *production formats* and *reception formats* simultaneously, and still be able to keep them apart, is probably one of her most essential skills.

6. Final remarks

The interpreter is supposed to make sense of, and make more or less explicit for the primary parties, what is said and what is heard. Given that we regard the translating task and the coordination task as constitutive for the interpreter's job, it is possible to distinguish between at least three different aspects of sense-making involved in her work. Firstly, we make sense of words and utterances on the basis of what we know about the *propositional* meaning of talk. Secondly, sense is made on the basis of the *interactional* meaning of talk. The interactional meaning created may be influenced on a local level, e.g. by the use of words in a particular part of an utterance, in a particular speed and intonation, accompanied by particular gestures, and other actions etc., and on what is present on a more global level, e.g. by a particular constellation of people, in combination with a particular time, place and social activities other than talk. Thirdly, sense is made on the basis of what is cued by the *participation framework* negotiated in and by talk. (Who is addressing whom, and who is supposed by whom to react how? In who's name and on who's account do people interact?).

Given an interactionistic perspective, the same aspects of sense-making is of course present in any conversation involving three or more persons. To engage in spoken interaction means to coordinate one's listening and speaking with others' listening and speaking. In a two-language talk, the interpreter's task is to translate for others and to do a certain part of others' coordinative work. Different aspects of sense-making are arguably involved in the distribution of responsibility in interpreter-mediated interaction.

The interpreter has a position in between the layperson and the officer. In a certain sense, she is in control of the encounter. Without her presence there would be no interaction at all. The monolingual persons cannot or do not wish to speak in a common language. This does not necessarily mean that she is in charge of the situation or that she conducts it. Anyhow, to explore the distribution of responsibility in a particular interpreter-mediated interaction will have to involve

exploring what is done to establish and sustain the interpreter's middle position; what is done by the interpreter as well as by the primary parties.

What from a *normative, individualistic* and a *monological* point of view looks like contrary positions, translating on the one extreme and mediating on the other, can be conceptualized as two mutually compatible dynamic aspects of the interpreter's inter-activity, given a *non-normative, interactionistic, dialogical* theoretical frame.

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