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Shakespeare in Translation

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A Translator on Parnassus

British Sign Language (2): Interpreting

Paul Michaels

In the last issue of *In Other Words* I gave an introduction to British Sign Language (BSL), which is the first or preferred recognised language of the British Deaf community. It is safe to say that most people in the UK do not have enough comprehension of BSL to converse with Deaf people. So, like any other people trying to speak to someone in a language they don't know, there becomes a need for interpretation and translation services.

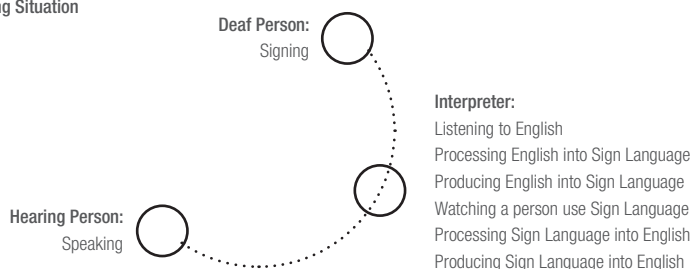
Reading the Winter 2012 issue of *In Other Words*, it struck me that there are some similarities and differences in the interpreting world I find myself immersed in daily and the parallel world of the many translators who read this journal. Therefore, I thought I would share just some of those thoughts...

Time

One difference I notice between translation and interpreting is the luxury of time. In most cases, when translating between British Sign Language and English, like with spoken languages, there is the luxury of being able to analyse the source text, think about linguistic choices of the target text and revisit those decisions. Time to make such decisions, though, is significantly reduced in consecutive interpreting, when sections of source language are listened to, possible notes made and messages rendered; and even more so when interpreting simultaneously, rendering messages into the target language as quickly as these can be formulated after receiving the message in the source language.

Something that significantly affects the ability to interpret simultaneously is the ability to process two different language modes. Spoken languages are auditory-vocal and sign languages are visual. Therefore, at any one time the following process may be taking place:

Common Interpreting Situation



This can be done but because of the complexities of the task, the interpreter cannot maintain this processing for any considerable time and will soon need to stop and take control of the processes happening. Cognitive load – the amount of information and interactions that are occurring – will affect working memory and ultimately, the interpretation taking place.

Lone working

The article on “Collaborative Translation” by Nick Caistor and Lorenza Garcia was interesting. Getting together to “compare and discuss” is a luxury rarely afforded to a Sign Language Interpreter. Most of the time I am working alone in a variety of domains: medical, interviews, meetings and training to name but a few. Therefore, in these and other situations, the decisions made when interpreting between BSL and English are instant and autonomous. There are times, however, when an interpreter may be working alone but may have had the opportunity to prepare for the assignments beforehand with a colleague. An example of this would be interpreting in the theatre. This is a domain that allows for, and indeed requires, full preparation prior to starting the assignment. Theatre interpreting commonly allows for two or three months’ preparation, as interpreters have to match exactly what is happening on stage through characterisation, musicality, pace, etc. That’s not to say that interpreters don’t match that when interpreting in other settings but there is more of a need to be interpreting a show at almost the exact time that it is happening on stage whereas with all other interpreting assignments there is inevitably a slight time delay.

Working with the original orator

Nick and Lorenza also mention the opportunity to discuss their translation with Andrés Neuman, which is such a luxury. Being able to take time to question the motives, desires and artistic aims of the writer ensures that the translation truly matches the original intent. I’m sure that, like for most translations, and generally in the case of sign language interpreting, this isn’t always possible. I find that within community interpreting, I am often able to clarify what people are saying and getting them to elaborate their intent; however, with situations such as formal lectures and presentations or AGMs, there is very little, if any, opportunity for this.

Literal vs free translation

I’m sure that when a translator is translating, they are thinking about the people who will read the final product and this is most definitely also the case for a sign language interpreter. They will think about the audience that is watching the

interpreting. In many situations I work in, I find that the audience is not just one deaf person and as a result, I need to consider the wide range of people watching my interpretation from English into BSL. Some deaf people are educated in a mainstream environment and will have a very good command of the English language that may be, for many years, their first and preferred language. These individuals will like to see an interpretation that is more at the English end of the BSL register and commonly referred to as Sign Supported English (English sentences are constructed and signs are used to support the English). This would be more like a literal translation. However, many individuals will be “grass roots” Deaf, i.e. they will most likely be from a Deaf family, will have been brought up using BSL as a first language and may not have a very good command of English. It is this group who would prefer a free translation.

Invisibility of the translator

Vineet Lal talks about the invisibility of the translator and the fact that they resemble a “ninja” in that they leave no trace of themselves except their text and that this is the mark of a successful translation. It is more than likely that a person reading a book that has been translated will never actually get to see the person that laboured over this translation. However, this is often not the case with a sign language interpreter. More often than not, the interpreter is physically in the room and therefore visible to all parties. Even if people present are not the ones relying on interpretation from English to Sign Language, they will most probably rely on interpretation from Sign Language to English when the Deaf person(s) wishes to contribute. Many people think that the Sign Language interpreter is only there for the Deaf person to have access to language but of course, this is not generally the case.

Female-dominated

José Saramago mentions in his article that most translators are women. That is very much the case in Sign Language interpreting as well. In 2009, whilst studying for a PGDip in Interpreting at Durham University, I undertook research that looked at Interpreting for the Deaf gay community. I found out, through an international survey of 304 interpreters that 72% were female and 28% were male. Interestingly, at that time, there was a high proportion of interpreters who identified themselves as gay or bisexual: 38%. This is an area I will be conducting further research on when I begin a PhD at Durham University in October.

In conclusion, I feel that there are a number of similarities that both the literary translator and Sign Language interpreter face; lone working and the debate over

literal compared to free translations, for example. On the other hand (pardon the pun!), I can also see the vast differences; the invisibility of the translator compared to the obvious visibility of the interpreter as well as the fact that the interpreter is having to work with the huge constraint of time, when there is an obvious need for immediate interpretation. However, the fact that we are providing access to information which would otherwise not be possible has to be the nicest and most rewarding similarity we share.

Translating at the Nuremberg Trials, 1947-49

Patricia Crampton

I left Oxford in 1946, with a decent second-class degree in Modern Languages – German main, French subsidiary, and one year’s Russian by special agreement with Miss Bickley, who was both my moral tutor and one of my German tutors. Miss Bickley gave tutorials in her comfortable sitting-room, with a blazing fire. Cosily settled, often after a night on the tiles (or in the Cher, where we used to swim with a group of New College medics), I would be asleep within minutes. When I woke up, I would find Miss Bickley reading peacefully, and beside my armchair a glass of milk sweetened with brown sugar, a prize for which, in those war years, she must have sacrificed precious food coupons.

The circumstances of my last interview with our Principal, the formidable Miss Gwyer, were also a little unusual. It was during Commem Week, and in the euphoria of having finished Final Schools, I was walking across the garden in evening dress at breakfast time when the Bursar caught me. (Not that I was trying to evade capture.) The Bursar didn’t like me at all. “Straight in to see Miss Gwyer!” she squeaked, quite viciously. Miss Gwyer seemed surprised, but not displeased, by my arrival and asked me why I had come. “The Bursar told me to report that I have just returned from a ball, Miss Gwyer. I was crossing the garden in evening dress.” Miss Gwyer continued to look surprised. “You’ve been taking your Final Schools, my dear?” she said. “Then you’re no longer *in statu pupillari*, I believe.” We settled down to a pleasant chat and she asked me if I would be returning to Oxford to teach. When I said that I was going to be a translator, Miss Gwyer was very interested indeed. “Is there such a profession?” she asked.

The University Appointments Board of the day pointed me in the direction

Daniel Hahn is a writer, editor and translator, with thirty-something books to his name. He is currently translating a Brazilian novel and compiling the new *Oxford Companion to Children's Literature*. He is also national programme director of the British Centre for Literary Translation, and editor of *In Other Words*.

Olivia Hellewell is a budding Slovene literary translator, currently studying for an MA in Translation Studies with Slovene at the University of Nottingham. She has worked as a translator of economic news from both Spanish and Slovene, but returned to university to focus on Slovene language and literature.

Anne Marie Jackson was the first translator from Russian to be mentored on the TA / BCLT mentorship programme. Currently she is translating a collection of stories by Teffi. Anne Marie's translation of *Istemi*, a novel by Alexei Nikitin, was published by Peter Owen this spring.

John Kearns has worked as a translator from Polish to English and has written extensively on translator training. He edits *Translation Ireland*, the journal of the Irish Translators' and Interpreters' Association.

Laurence Laluyaux is a literary agent at Rogers Coleridge and White Ltd. She taught French in the US and worked briefly as a translator in the UK prior to becoming an agent.

Sophie Lewis is a London-born writer, editor and translator from French. Her translations include works by Marcel Aymé, Violette Leduc, Stendhal and Jules Verne. She is Editor-at-Large at the independent publisher And Other Stories and has been living in Rio de Janeiro since 2011.

Hilary Mantel is a British novelist. Her books include *Fludd, A Place of Greater Safety* and *An Experiment in Love*; and most recently the first two in a planned trilogy about Thomas Cromwell and the Court of Henry VIII, *Wolf Hall* and *Bring Up the Bodies*. She has been twice shortlisted for the Orange Prize, twice won the Man Booker Prize, and won the Costa Book of the Year and the David Cohen Prize.

Canan Marasligil is a writer, literary translator, editor and screenwriter. She is translator in residence at the Free Word Centre in London. <http://cananmarasligil.com>

Paul Michaels started to learn sign language in 2001 after his niece was diagnosed as profoundly deaf. He qualified as a BSL / English interpreter in 2011 and is currently undertaking an MRes at Durham University, analysing the identity, culture and language of the deaf gay community.

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Jonathan Rupp has worked at Foyles Bookshop for ten years, where is now web editor. He is also a member of the editorial committee for *New Books in German* and a freelance journalist. He tweets as @tintiddle.

Michal Shavit is editorial director at Harvill Secker, an imprint of Random House. Harvill Secker is one of the most prestigious and highly regarded imprints in British and world publishing. In its original incarnation it was founded in 1910, and has been a major force in publishing ever since. It is the publisher of writers as varied as George Orwell, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, J.M. Coetzee, Umberto Eco, Günter Grass, Haruki Murakami, David Lodge, Yasmina Reza, Laurent Binet, Elif