

A Discourse of Danger and Loss:

Interpreters on Interpreting for the European Parliament

Europe has a proud tradition of interpreting.¹ The professional field known as conference interpreting mythologizes its origin in Nuremberg at the landmark international tribunal of Nazi war criminals. Ethics of democratic justice, respect for speakers of different languages, and high standards of representative accuracy characterized those historic trials in the 1940s. These ethical precepts became institutionalized during the 1950s and 1960s in the first interpreter training programs and earliest infrastructure of what would become the European Union. One of the most prominent policies today is the right for Members of the European Parliament to speak their own national language. This right is codified in Procedural Rule 138, mandating a principle of linguistic equality that exists nowhere else in the world. The ideal of multilingualism is promoted in the European Union (EU) through many such institutional policies, extensive funding for language learning, and official rhetoric. Debate, however, over the financing of interpreting services is a recurrent issue during EU budget negotiations and persists as a constant political undercurrent. The contentiousness of the discourse of financial priorities and planning may lead to the impression that linguistic equality can only be measured *as a value* through brute economics and simple symbolism.

The interpreters who are charged with the mission of creating linguistic equality – of making communicative accessibility *real*, allowing each official EU language equal prestige, and each speaker of those languages a chance at rhetorical power – have their own perspective. A critical discourse analysis of interviews with interpreters for the European Parliament discovered several themes about “what happens” during interpretation from the professional interpreter’s point-of-view. One theme concerns the

¹ Interpreting is the spontaneous reproduction of communication among speakers of different languages. Variously categorized (*e.g.*, consecutive interpreting, conference interpreting, community interpreting, simultaneous interpreting), interpreting is qualitatively *distinct from the written* activity of translation.

growing use of lingua francas instead of speaking in one's national language. A language that is known in common (albeit to varying degrees) by interlocutors in an interaction is labeled the lingua franca.² English is most frequently named although concerns are raised with French and German. The issue here is one of linguistic advantage and disadvantage due to varying levels of fluency. This concern with *native* language use (since "national language" is almost always synonymous with "mother tongue") is often overshadowed by the dichotomizing public debate about language use: is speaking in one's national/native language a matter of economy or efficacy? If fluency of speech is *a matter of economic cost*, this leads to assessments of symbolic value and the reinforcement of doubt about whether interpreting is worth paying for. If fluency of speech is understood as *a reflection of fluency of thought*, then the matter of efficacy is raised: is interpreting the best means of democratic deliberation?

These two themes are agonistic: "mother tongue or lingua franca" is inextricably intertwined with "economy versus efficacy" in public rhetoric and discourse. Each theme invokes the other, apparently bounding conceptual imagination. Undergirding both themes, however, is a common sense notion of the relationship between language and meaning. The basic conception locates meaning *in* particular words or phrases of a specific language, leading (naturally) to the interpreter's task of transferring the (presumed) original meaning *from* one language and *into* another. There is an obvious logic to such a transmission view of communication³: there are many instances when this mental model is sufficient for describing what happens, or what needs to happen, in order

² "The term lingua franca comes from an Italian phrase for "Frankish language". The term harkens back to the traditional role of French as the "language of diplomacy". The underlying idea was that no matter what languages two diplomats might speak at home, they could always communicate if both had a command of French. Indeed, at one time it was not unusual for aristocrats and royalty in the courts of eastern Europe to speak French in lieu of the native tongues of their subjects...At one time Latin and Greek played this role among scholars. These days, English has assumed the role of the lingua franca in many parts of the world..." Foote and Roberts, 1998.

³ The transmission model as used here is not a variation on the conduit model well-known – and debunked – in Interpreting Studies. The conduit model refers to the interpreter's *role*, whereas the transmission model refers to the site of *meaning*.

for mutual understanding to occur among individuals whose thought processes have necessarily been shaped by the idiosyncracies of their own language exposure.

Theoretical Backdrop: Scientific Paradigms and Models of Communication

Thomas Kuhn (1962) narrowed the scope of the term, paradigm, when applied to science. He allows that the “established usage” of *paradigm* as “an accepted model or pattern...permits the appropriation” of the term for his use, clarifying: “In a science...a paradigm is rarely an object for replication...it is an object for further articulation and specification under new or more stringent conditions” (23). The specificity of Kuhn’s definition comes from the attempt to describe “the actual situations in which knowledge is gained” (9). His primary point is that once knowledge is established, it becomes normalized, taken for granted, assumed, and generally unquestioned: “normal science.” The question Kuhn investigates regards what happens when a previously canonized base of knowledge gives over to a new, different way of knowing. The “structure” Kuhn outlines is abstract: less *the content of what* is known than *the form of how* a particular thing is known. These forms of knowledge generate the fact of incommensurability between paradigms, for definite reasons.

The work of a scientific paradigm is explicitly to define boundaries. The power of a paradigm lies in the relationship between its scope and precision in solving known problems. Once a paradigm is established, normal science builds upon its particular premises by “increasing the extent of the match between those facts [actualized by the paradigm] and the paradigm’s predictions, and by further articulation of the paradigm itself” (24). A paradigm is, in functional effect, disciplinary. Normal science is an “enterprise [which] seems an attempt to force nature into the preformed and relatively inflexible box that the paradigm supplies. No part of the aim of normal science is to call forth new sorts of phenomena; indeed those that will not fit the box are often not seen at all” (24).

Kuhn is not offering a negative critique, however, explaining that the restrictions of the paradigm box are essential to science's ongoing development and indicate maturity in a given field of scientific inquiry. While the achievements of a normalized paradigm are never lost, they are also not necessarily immortal. What makes scientific paradigms *scientific* is the "built-in mechanism that ensures the relaxation of the restrictions that bound research whenever the paradigm from which they derive ceases to function effectively. At that point scientists begin to behave differently, and the nature of their research problems changes" (24). These pivot points mark scientific revolutions.

It is necessary to recall that Kuhn arrived at his own revolutionary analysis of scientific progress by applying insights about perception and "the effect of language on world view" (viii).⁴ Given space limits, a summary of the distinction articulated by James W. Carey (1975) between a transmission model of communication and a ritual model of communication must serve to illustrate one of the crucial ways language use shapes knowledge.⁵ Carey could have been referring explicitly to Interpreting Studies when he wrote: "Our basic orientation to communication remains grounded, at the deepest roots of our thinking, in the idea of transmission: communication is a process whereby messages are transmitted and distributed in space for the control of distance and people" (3).

The transmission view has become increasingly embedded in the popular common sense over the last three centuries with the inseparable linkages between transportation (from railways to jet airplanes) and ever-faster ways of receiving/sending information (from the telegraph to instant messaging). Such an emphasis on closing space, on reducing distance and the passage of time between communicants, is essentially different than the ritual view of communication, which, according to Carey, "exploits the ancient identity and common roots of the terms commonness, communion, and communication. A ritual view of communication is not directed toward the extension of messages in space but *the maintenance of society in time*: not the act of imparting

⁴ Particularly, Kuhn credits Gestalt psychologists and the work of Benjamin Whorf.

⁵ Methodological note: The same premise of the relation between language and knowing that enlivens the success of discourse analysis.

information but *the representation of shared beliefs*” (emphasis added, 6). Carey’s juxtaposition of these two views is an intellectual move on the foundation laid by John Dewey, who “better than most of us...understood that communication has had two contrasting definitions in the history of Western thought” (2). The relevance of the inherent “creative tension” (2) between these two conceptions for the field of interpreting is not that one “denies what the other affirms [because a] ritual view does not exclude the processes of information transmission or attitude change” (9). The problem for interpreting studies is that by recognizing only the transmission aspect of the communication process, interpreters operate within an intellectual paradigm that is gravely one-sided.

Coming to terms with a ritual view of communication means realizing interpreting as a cultural invention. Taking the liberty to substitute *interpreting* for *newspapers* (which is Carey’s example to show the radical difference of analytical implication between the transmission and ritual views), the “historic reality ... is [that interpreting] is a form of culture invented by a particular class at a particular point of history . . . an invention in historical time that like most other human inventions will dissolve when the class that sponsors it and its possibility of having significance for us evaporates” (8-9). It is not within the scope of this paper to explore the class conditions relevant to the ostensive birth of conference interpreting at Nuremberg. However, this specific historicity does highlight a particular junction of politics, war, language, and justice that cannot be dismissed as inconsequential.

In Networking the World (2000), Armand Mattelart demonstrates how “the invention of communication as an ideal” (2) involved “standardization and doing away with chance” (4). Beginning with the telegraph, railway, and transatlantic radio communication in the eighteenth century, and continuing with “the invention of news and the ideal of instantaneous information” in the nineteenth century (23), Mattelart traces the ways that technologies of communication are inextricably interwoven with diplomacy, war, and global relations. A single comprehensive network – one system of values, conveyed through common mechanisms (i.e., one *universal language*) – has been the

goal of nation-states and capitalists for centuries. In a previous work (1994), Mattelart lays out the intellectual trajectories of a handful of academics who established the premises guiding communication theory today (including James Carey and John Dewey) describing the way in which they “exploded the postulate of the priority of content over form, that is, to have insisted on the fact that the medium itself determines the character of what is communicated and leads to a new type of civilization” (128).⁶

The *medium* at stake is the use of monolingual or interpreted communication: one language or many. The civilization in question is that of Europe. The question posed is what do interpreters know about this choice? What perspective do interpreters bring to interpreting’s possibility of significance (paraphrasing Carey), and for which current or future classes of people? The only way to find out is to listen to what interpreters say, at the dawn of the 21st century, about their conditions and experiences of work. In this regard, the present study falls right in line with the discourse studies framework used by Franz Pöchhacker (2007) to identify commonalities across previously understood differences within the field of Interpreting Studies.

Theoretical Conversation in Context: Critical Links in Professional Interpreting

Franz Pöchhacker identifies three convergences in Interpreting Studies that demonstrate kinship “in the disciplinary space extending between the realm of professional practice and training, on the one hand, and established scientific disciplines, on the other” (18). There is no disputing the “broad areas of interface with regard to settings, modes and topics” (18) occurring within and across interpreting research by practitioners and academics alike. In regard to **settings**, Ebru Diriker has taken many of the lessons of community interpreting research on the socio-cultural and interactional aspects of interpreting and applied them explicitly in her situated analysis of conference interpreting. She concludes (among other things), that assumptions “in the belief that

⁶ Carey explains that the American Marshall McLuhan is probably the most well known, but his work builds on Harold Innis (Canadian) and Lewis Mumford (American), whose work stands on the shoulders of Peter Kropotkin (Russian) and Patrick Geddes (Scots).

there are transcendental signifieds and immanent meanings in language, tend to – inevitably and, to some extent purposefully, – simplify a more complex and situational relationship between the interpreter and the speaker and play down the presence of the interpreter as the real ‘I’ in the delivery” (2004: 147).

The simultaneous **mode** of interpreting is widely shared, as Pöchhacker observes, among “simultaneous conference interpreters, signed-language interpreters, and spoken-language dialogue interpreters alike” (19). As to **topic**, Pöchhacker delineates three broad themes in the literature of Interpreting Studies: evidence of a growing socio-linguistic orientation, the concept(s) of “discourse” along with the method(s) of discourse analysis, and what he calls “cognition in communication” (20). Pöchhacker reaches his conclusions based on five scientific approaches to the study of interpreting as they appear historically in the literature: interpretive theory *a la* Seleskovitch (1962), cognitive processing (e.g., Gerver 1971), cognitive neurolinguistics, target-text production of equivalent function, and dialogic interactionism (namely Wadensjö, 1998). Citing Setton’s 1998 paper as an exemplar, Pöchhacker describes contemporary “cognitive-pragmatic analysis... [as] ...anchored in an input- as well as knowledge-driven mental representation“ (20).

Pöchhacker demonstrates how interdisciplinary collaboration has enhanced contemporary capacities for comprehending the dense complexity of interpreting, yet he overstates the case that the kinship among interpreting modes, settings, and topics of academic and professional discourse represents a “blurring of boundaries *between* paradigms” (emphasis added, 21). The convergences named by Pöchhacker are indisputable: interpreting is interpreting, irregardless of variety. Interpreters and interpreting researchers recognize similar problems and common concerns. This is a kinship that is endemic to the field of activity. The actual scientific paradigm lies in cognitive science, which epistemologically places the origin of meaning in the individual mind.

Nonetheless, Pöchhacker’s use of the term, paradigm, in his argument “for an increasingly coherent disciplinary space” (21) is constructive. The field of Interpreting

Studies has indeed moved away from historically stark divisions of setting, mode, and topic toward what Pöchhacker call's dialogic discourse and interaction. The resulting coherence, however, is an illustration of one of the modes of normal science operating *within* a paradigm. Pöchhacker's analysis seeks "common ground and interrelations" (11), which is contextually necessary and appropriate for his authorial task in that particular paper of "critically linking up" a diversity of contemporary thought regarding the professionalization of community interpreting. As such, Pöchhacker's search for common ground uniting approaches to the study and explication of interpreting falls within Kuhn's second class of "normal foci for factual scientific investigation" (25).

In Kuhn's words, "the attempt to demonstrate agreement is a second type of normal experimental work, and it is even more obviously dependent than the first upon a paradigm" (27). (The first type of normal experimental science has to do with "revealing...the nature of things" (26).) Hence, Pöchhacker's work obviously contributes to the permanent influence that the cognitive paradigm exerts on Interpreting Studies and the practice of interpreting, by helping "to define the problem[s we recognize] and to guarantee the existence of a stable solution [through which to study these problems]" (28). Pöchhacker is engaged in Kuhn's theoretical paradigm articulation by reformulating through clarification the disparate thoughts of the pre-paradigmatic era into a more uniform and logically coherent version. An outcome of such clarification is the outline it provides for *the shape of knowing about* interpreting – a worldview, epistemology, or paradigm of interpreting – by interpreters and interpreting researchers.

Methodology: Cultural Communication and the Matter of Voice

This paper aims to beyond description to theoretical interpretation by combining cultural communication theory and critical discourse analysis. Cultural communication privileges the ritual view of communication (while still recognizing the role of transmission), and cultural discourse analysis "focuses its critique on the intersection of language/discourse/speech and social structure... [by] uncovering ways in which social

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structure relates to discourse patterns (in the form of power relations, ideological effects, and so forth” (Blommaert, 2005:25).

This study’s methodology is grounded in critical discourse analysis because language hierarchies are taken for granted. As defined by sociolinguist Jan Blommaert, the use of language to accomplish desired ends is *voice* (ibid). Voice is the power to influence situations and/or control one’s own situation through one’s facility with language. “Voice,” Blommaert explains, “stands for the way in which people manage to make themselves understood or fail to do so. In doing so, they draw upon and deploy discursive means which they have at their disposal, and they have to use them in contexts that are specified as to conditions of use. Consequently, if these conditions are not met, people ‘don’t make sense’ – they fail to make themselves understood – and the actual reasons for this are manifold” (4-5). As a tool, the effective exercise of voice is a linguistic resource that is contingent upon complex interplays of context, fluency, and status. Codes of ethics for professional interpreters tend to preclude – if not outright ban – the interpreter’s voice from the interpreted situation; hence, interviews about interpreting are one of the few means by which interpreters’ feedback about communication can be returned to specific events and systems. Additionally, concerns about voice arise in discussion about the worth or value of interpretation, typically in the form of questions about representative integrity and accuracy of meaning.

Cultural communication theory was developed by Gerry Philipsen (1987) and utilized and enhanced by Donal Carbaugh (most recently 2005) and scores of others. Philipsen and Carbaugh build on Dell Hymes’ (1962) theory known as the ethnography of communication. “Cultural communication can be understood as an approach to investigating the premises and practices of shared identity as these are active in conversation and cultural life” (Carbaugh, 2005:26). Cultural communication theory outlines a means not only for identifying practices and describing patterns in social interaction but also provides a set of rigorous tools for deducing the premises that make the practices sensible to those engaging in (and engaged by) them. From this viewpoint,

Culture is not a physical space, a social group of people, nor a whole way of living, although it does create, when used, mutually intelligible senses of place, persons, and patterns of living. What culture is, from this view, is a system of expressive practices that is fraught with feeling, and ... alerts interlocutors to their common life, its particularities of place, people, and patterns of life, whether these exist in conflict or harmony. (Carbaugh, 60).

What is “mutually intelligible” to interpreters about the place, persons, and patterns of living within the work environment of the European Parliament? What “expressive practices” contribute (from the interpreter’s perspective) to the maintenance – or evaporation – of interpreting as a medium of communication? Sixty-five interviews were conducted in the spring of 2005, near the end of the European Parliament’s first full year after the 2004 Enlargement, which added ten new member nations (Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia). The total interview corpus includes three interpreters from each member country’s language “booth” – a term that refers both to the physical room in which interpreters work, and the crew or group of interpreters working *into* a particular national language. (The custom in conference interpreting is to interpret from “passive” (second, third, fourth – or more!) languages into one “active” language, typically the interpreter’s own native tongue. The “active” language drives employment in a particular national language booth.)⁷

The interviews were open-ended, loosely structured around questions concerning how interpreting is working, not working, and the interpreter’s explanations of why such is the case. Many of the conversations were devoted to helping the author understand, first, the general workings of the overall interpretation system within the European

⁷ The Maltese Booth was not yet staffed, so there were twenty-four booths comprising several hundred interpreters with varied language combinations. Each booth attempts to cover as many passive languages as possible in order to avoid *pivot*. If someone speaks in a language unknown to all teammates in a booth, they will depend upon another interpreter’s version of the original text into a language they do understand (often French, German, or English, sometimes Polish) and use that as their “source” – as a pivot – to interpret into their own active language.

Parliament, and second, to clarifying nuances and details of how the system is intended to function – and toward which goals – in comparison with how the system functions in actual practice. Ultimately, the search is to discover what interpreters have to say about language, interpreting, and language choice as a feature of democracy. The theme that will be developed here concerns source language and its relation to meaning and understanding.

Overview: Simultaneous Interpreting from “The Booth” in Twenty-Five Languages

The 2004 Enlargement nearly doubled the size of the language regime in the European Parliament (EP), from fifteen to twenty-five languages, which - in practical terms – nearly quadrupled the need for qualified interpreters. In terms of the simultaneous interpreting system, the change was from a need for various passive-language combinations among fourteen languages into fifteen active languages, to the need for even more varied passive-language combinations among twenty-four languages into twenty-five active tongues. “Unusual language combinations” (those that cross language families, for instance, or include so-called “smaller” languages) are now prized, whereas the standard combinations (of three or four of the dominant/larger languages with, ideally, one smaller language) no longer guarantee as much job security or stability as they did for decades.

Almost all of the EP interpreters interviewed in the spring of 2005 report, with varying degrees of surprise and pride, that the enlarged language regime “is actually working.” Of course interpreters also acknowledge problems, challenges, and changes to institutional culture of concern to anyone invested in the success of the European Dream. The preliminary discourse analysis presented here highlights crucial patterns regarding how professional interpreters perceive the quality of communication among elected delegates – the Members of Parliament (MPs) – as they craft legislation and advocate the interests of their respective nations.

The European Parliament provides a perfect site for studying language, interpreting, voice, culture, and democracy because of its heterogeneous composition and its explicit mission. Although the United Nations deserves credit for its own multilingual interpreting tradition. In contrast with the European Parliament, the UN recognizes only six official languages: Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish. The European Commission, the Council of Ministers, and the Court of Justice (core EU institutions alongside the European Parliament) also have reduced language regimes, recognizing as official a much smaller subset of working languages than are representative of the European Union as a whole. Only in the European Parliament are all national languages deemed “official” and hence recognized as actual “working” languages. Only in the European Parliament is the multilingual right of EU citizens established with the chance of being fully practiced as preached.

Much of the EP interpreters’ talk mirrors the public debate about the symbolic value and/or perceived cost of interpreting. This will not be detailed here. Nor will the full range of problems interpreters encounter in the attempt to perform their work. The rest of this paper will summarize a specific linguistic challenge that appeared in nearly every interview concerning whether or not the original speaker uses their own national language (as noted, probably their mother tongue) or chooses, instead, to speak in another language as a lingua franca. No information is available at this time from the Members of Parliament themselves concerning why they opt not to use their national language; the quotations provided below are exclusively from the interpreter’s point-of-view. Indeed, the descriptions and explanations from EP interpreters are eloquent. They require minimal transitional commentary from the author. Each of the selected quotations is representative of a pool of similar sentiments.

Lingua francas: “Killing the Magic of Language”

Interpreters consistently and regularly complain about speakers’ reading of prepared texts. “The difficulty here is . . . speed and badly spoken languages.”

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Comments about speed-reading-out-loud range from critique of the delivery (e.g. as fast as possible without pause) to doubt regarding intention (such as MPs are not seeking to communicate with each other). While mentioned by the majority of EP interpreters, the matter of reading prepared text was not accompanied by as much apparent emotion as the concern with “badly spoken languages.” The inference is MPs’ communication in a non-native lingua franca instead of deploying the full range of their linguistic resources through use of their mother tongue. “It’s Globe-ish again. It’s bad English. It’s sometimes bad French.” Other interpreters were more blunt: “crap French,” and “even bad German.” The general view is represented by this interpreter’s comment: “People are getting used to a lower level of quality and a kind of communication that relies on broken English.”

Insert Table: Epithets for English

“[T]he English-speaking look-alikes” are described by interpreters in detail: “It’s not as if its English spoken by Englishmen. That’s one kind of English, but...it’s mainly another kind of...Pidgen English that’s spoken by...no natives. Many of the new member states have sometimes a very proximate knowledge of English and that makes for a completely different kind of English, a kind of jargon. Sometimes they don’t know the value of certain words or expressions, and that’s a danger.” The sentiment of danger was common among EP interpreters, because “you’re not really sure they [MPs] know what they’re saying.” Consequently, the output from interpreters “might be slightly different. It might not be exactly what the speaker is trying to say. Obviously you aren’t doing this on purpose, but are desperately trying to understand something and then say something in the target language.” These three dangers arise repeatedly: of interlocutors possibly not knowing what they are saying, whether interlocutors know the range of implications for what they are saying, and of interpreters saying something other than what the speaker intended. Additionally, many interpreters also talk about a related loss.

“You lose the implications of what they [MPs] say, the turns of phrase that indicate that something special is going on.” What that “something special” might be was described primarily along the dimension of nationality/culture. “The fact that a Greek tells you something, or a Swede tells you something, gets lost.” Interpreters do not seem to mean only the national identity label, but something perhaps ineffable, a subtle and abstract quality of mind:

When you speak a language, you implicitly accept the categories of that language. What you can express is limited by the categories that exist in that language. That means you might find yourself in a position where your political discourse is dictated by what is accepted, what is fashionable or not fashionable in a given language. For example, the Anglo-Saxon way of expressing yourself carries with it a certain perception of the world. When a Lithuanian or a Greek or a Portuguese uses English, in some way I think they are giving up part of their world and replacing it with a sort of internationalized sort of world view.

~ *European Parliament Interpreter*

Comments about the relationship between language and worldview appear frequently throughout the interview transcripts with the subtext (sometimes articulated, sometimes implied) that the types of diversity resulting from this relationship are important and valuable. At the same time, some interpreters argue in support of MPs use of a lingua franca, or at least try to envision their reasons. “If everybody has a lingua franca where there are no advantages or privileged positions among the speakers, then why should they use interpreters? But that is also never the case. You always have someone who speaks native, mother tongue whereas others are required to have this foreign language, and you don’t have this equality any more...If someone is struggling with the language you can lose very important points, or a debate.” Likewise, “Native speakers are not bothered by people speaking their language wrong because they know it’s not their mother tongue and they will try and understand and grasp the meaning of what the person who is speaking is saying. I think that all the other people who share that language as a tool will not be bothered too much by the fact that that person speaks badly.

I think the only people who are bothered by it are the interpreters because they actually hear where the communication breaks down once in a while.”

What do interpreters mean by communication breakdowns? The same issues already alluded to above are repeated with more specificity: “We see that [MPs] lexicon is reduced by seventy or eighty percent when you venture into another language,” and “[MPs] can’t tackle important things with their bad language.” These factors can lead to palpable problems, such as “misunderstandings, embarrassment, or no reaction at all, when the speaker obviously would like some reaction from the audience.” The frequency of such breakdowns is unclear from the current corpus of data, because while some interpreters observe such instances of breakdown only “once in a while,” others say, “We witness the contradictions every day – the mistakes – every day.” This divergence in perception invites more questions about how interpreters conceive of interpersonal communication, particularly in this political context of international decision-making.

How can it be that such communication norms exist when the stakes are obviously so high? Clearly the perspective of the MPs themselves is necessary to glean a full picture, but interpreters do speculate: “People tend to think better of themselves than they are. Then what happens is they decide to abandon their mother tongue and speak in one of the foreign languages because they think they know it, when they don’t know it (or know it adequately).” Some interpreters are also unwilling to pass ultimate judgment: “They have the impression to communicate better, but do they communicate better? I don’t know. It’s getting across general ideas, but the finesse, the nuances get completely lost.”

The question of measurement returns, what is being lost? What is being gained? How much will the loss cost? What benefits accrue from what is gained? No one can predict what the future holds, although a large percentage of the interpreters who participated in this study had many years of experience in a range of European Institutions. Interpreters’ generally shared (though not universal) sense of loss certainly outweighs any sense of gain (with most interpreters hastening to qualify that the sensibility (of loss) is not because of the simple desire to maintain employment): “...if

it's a Polish speaking bad English, I have no clue [what they mean]. And this is becoming part of our work more and more. The English that we have to translate from is second or third language English – from people who do not *think* in that language.” If speakers are not fluent enough to think in the language they are using, “It’s like Finnish and English: you need to be a Finn to understand that kind of English,” or, “...a kind of Swenglish that will not be easily understood by the interpreters unless they have Swedish or Danish...because they won’t understand the structure behind or why they use certain words.” The combinations are myriad: “Unless you know Spanish grammar, [their English is] very difficult to follow.”

This is a different kind of convergence than Franz Pöchhacker celebrates. What interpreters observe as MPs move toward using a lingua franca (especially English) and away from practicing their right to speak their own national language is that “the nuances are lost and everybody gets to something grey. The passion is lost. It becomes more generalized because that’s all you can say in that kind of language.” Not only is the content and complexity of conversation reduced, but “people pretend that they understand and they don’t. Because they’re too embarrassed to admit they don’t know English.” Interpreters find “it’s difficult to say, ‘Look, don’t speak English anymore.’” Trying to do so? “It’s very very delicate...” Interpreters agree with the democratic principle that the right of language choice is an actual and legitimate choice: “You can’t stop people from speaking other languages. They’re quite proud about it.” And, “Senior officials from member states want to show off their language skills...” Such desires and pressures add up: “It’s very hard to tell them, ‘Look, with your English, you’re better to not speak it if you can’t say it.’”

As a researcher and an outsider, I do not know if the viewpoints of danger and loss expressed in this particular theme of interpreters’ discourse about interpreting for the European Parliament are well-known among the Members of Parliament or by the Institution’s permanent staff. I was particularly struck, however, by the following indication that the evidence of communication breakdowns because of the use of English

as a lingua franca are present and available for everyone in the EP to recognize and act upon.

“This is an environment where the illusion of being understood correctly easily gets created. For example, if you are in a meeting and have to say something, you’ll probably be referring to a text that has been talked about in three, four, or five previous meetings, so everybody knows what you’re talking about. That’s a great advantage because even if you don’t express yourself exactly, the listener knows what you’re talking about and can fill in the gaps, so you get the illusion of being understood if you speak English. This is very dangerous because then you think that with your medium English, you get understood and you don’t need all these interpreters...I even had my doubts, but the proof is they don’t understand each other. You see it especially when there’s a new topic. People who think their English is good have to speak in their mother tongue because they can’t cope with speaking in English – the new terms, new reality they don’t know.”

~ *European Parliament Interpreter*

Discussion: Turning to a New Paradigm

Language choice is a matter of great significance to interpreters because of fluency. The more fluent a speaker is in the language they are using, the more sensible their meaning, hence, the more readily interpretable. In other words, interpreters are focused upon (and highly affected by) the relationship between language and thought, and therefore with the efficacy of communication. Interpreters are acutely sensitive to the exercise of *voice* and lament the failure of Members of Parliament to achieve *voice* because of their use of a lingua franca. European Parliament Interpreters describe the risk of institutional lack of success in accomplishing linguistic equality as *dangerous* and *a loss*. This collective viewpoint draws attention to the decision to use one’s mother tongue (technically, national language) or a lingua franca as a choice of medium.

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If we embrace the discipline of Communication's general acceptance of Marshall McLuhan's "daring distillation of Innis" (Thomas W. Cooper, cited by Mattelart, 1994:128) that "the medium is the message," we enter a new paradigm. The locus of this paradigm is the social construction of meaning over time through communicative rituals. This view is in direct contradistinction to the location of meaning established by cognitive science in individual mental processes and representations. The ritual view does not remove the individual's unique perspective, experiences, or potential, rather it privileges the *how* of interaction over the *what*. Interpreters have witnessed and intuit the continued trajectory of "expressive practices" over time as their "fraught with feeling" discourse about source language reveals. The influence of the cognitive paradigm has obscured Interpreting Studies' ability to name *the co-construction of meaning* as the space where social interaction becomes communicative in the sense of creating mutual understanding. This co-constructed mutuality is the heart of *dialogue*, a term which not only invokes but *requires* linguistic equality through the parallel and interdependent exercise of voice.

Abdelhak Elghezouani (2007) writes of a model of interpreting focused on maximizing the interpreter's functional capacities to contribute collaboratively to the comprehensive goals of a particular event in its given institutional setting. "It would be naïve," he says, "to believe that the participants of a conversation mediated by an interpreter are not conscious of the fact that they are committed to a specific and unique form of communication" (217). As we have seen, the discourse of European Parliament Interpreters shows some skepticism about Members of Parliament's commitment to linguistic equality, however I suggest that interpreting practitioners, trainers, and researchers are partly to blame for this state of affairs. Through *our* discourse we have imposed and reinforced an atomistic cognitive paradigm. We have taught interlocutors to minimize our participation and effect within the system of communication: we have created rituals that minimize our voice. This presents a barrier to answering Graham Turner's call to practice "lateral thinking" and "actively bring [interlocutors] into the process of negotiating meaning" (2007:181). As professionals – practitioners and

researchers – the quality of what we present and perform as “interpreting” involves the creative tension between the cognitive and social constructivist paradigms. It is too simplistic to align cognitive with transmission and social construction with ritual because all four of these perspectives have intellectual merit. The intellectual commitment and practical choice is of epistemological priority.

Elghezouani’s proposed solution of privileging the larger institutional setting’s purported goals as a guide to interpreter decision-making is problematized by another tension, clearly articulated by Pöchhacker: “...the more we foreground the institutional and behavioral aspects of mediated interaction, the greater the likelihood that expertise in conference interpreting will prove insufficient for the actual training needs of interpreters in the community” (14). Pöchhacker refers to the prototype of conference (simultaneous, from ‘the booth’) interpreting, whereas Elghezouani’s prototype is the classic triad of sender-mediator-receiver. Elghezouani’s presentation of the “socio-verbal dynamic activity” of interpreting as a zone where “all protagonists are starting from their own positions, have each their own knowledge and interests and are working towards the co-construction of a new interpersonal and social reality” (217) is elegant. Yet the reliance on the triadic prototype (legitimate as it is) invokes the same cognitive frame as the prototype of conference interpreting: *meaning* still seems to be conceived of as independently generated by interlocutors and *mediated* by the interpreter, rather than the *interpreting itself* being understood as *part-and-parcel of conjoint meaning*.

The legacy of dialogic social interaction in Interpreting Studies stretches as far back as the cognitive paradigm. Pöchhacker’s piece documents this historic fact. Temporality is also a core feature of all explanations of interpreting, although not in a ritual sense. Pöchhacker explains: “distinctions applied to the concept of interpreting...in the twentieth century... [were] generally made with reference to the temporal mode of realization, i.e. consecutive versus simultaneous” (12). The emphasis Pöchhacker gives to the *disciplining* elements that promote disciplinary convergence serve to clarify the cognitive paradigm. His careful tracing of training and research approaches to Interpreting encompasses the evidence of an alternative paradigm whose explanatory

power continues to grow. The point of pivot, however, has not yet been reached: the scientific revolution of a paradigm shift is being held at bay by the strong intellectually legacy of the cognitive sciences. Many practitioners and researchers are on the cusp of this shift and continue to point the way toward it, having either anticipated it or always been a member of the minority camp (e.g., from Wadensjo back through Roy to Seleskovitch herself). Elghezouani's work in mental health care settings (particularly for refugees) bears striking resemblances to Diriker's conclusions about the socio-cultural complexity of simultaneous conference interpreting, which

[point] to the difficulty and vulnerability of the interpreter in co-existing with another's 'I' in the delivery...[and] At the same time, however, the analysis in this study suggests the presence of multiple speaker-positions that are available to the interpreter in the delivery....highlight[ing] the main negotiator position of the interpreter in working out a discursive representation of the speaker in the delivery amidst a highly complex network of relationships, expectations, and constraints imposed by the actual contexts. (148)

The theme of "mother tongue or lingua franca" in interpreters' discourse about interpreting for the European Parliament shows us an environment where intercultural communication risks becoming its own peculiar homogeny. Elghezouani cautions: "...it should not be neglected that interpreting is a human activity, implying an interpersonal involvement from which novel, mutual, social and mental constructions may arise" (221). As a medium, the choice of monolingual lingua franca over interpreted mother tongue takes primacy in the co-construction *over time* of a European Union premised upon linguistic equality. The message in the medium regards the co-enactment of democracy among speakers of different languages. For interpreters, the choice is between the cognitive and social construction paradigms: the pivot points are where we decide meaning lies: 1) *moreso* in *what we say* (content) or *moreso* in *how we do* (form), and 2) in *speed and proximity* (transmission) or in the *unfolding over time* (ritual). Our paradigm choice affects the epistemology of interlocutors in the mutual endeavor of communicating through interpretation.

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**European Parliament Interpreters' Epithets for
English as a Lingua Franca**

this *uniform kind of* English
this *international* English
this *strange* English
what they think of as English
Globe-ish
what they think as American English

medium English
this *bad* English
this *ridiculous* Pidgin English

this *business* English
a *global* English
this *whatever -the-hell-it-is*
this *general* Globe-ish English
broken English
primitive English

~ from interviews with Interpreters,
European Parliament, 2005