Business Interpreting: Toward Communicative Competence

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ビジネス通訳：コミュニケーション能力の向上のために

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Summary

Business interpreting, in contrast with other categories of interpreting work such as conference interpreting and community interpreting, has not been the subject of extensive research. Interpreting research to date has focused predominantly on the cognitive processes used by individual interpreters in conference interpreting settings, and consequently the layperson may assume that the respective types of interpreting work do not differ greatly. In actual fact there are significant differences in the nature of each type of interpreting work and consequently the skills required. While such differences are common knowledge amongst interpreters, few efforts have been made to describe and/or document the features and requirements of business interpreting. As a result, the true nature of the job is still a mystery for interpreting students who have yet to experience it. In this study, we apply the SPEAKING model proposed by the linguist Dell Hymes to analyze interpreting in a business setting. We then provide some preliminary indicators of the non-technical skills required for the business interpreter in Japan and the challenges that s/he is likely to face. It is hoped that this study will contribute to an extension of interpreter instruction to be more inclusive of some of the social and communicative aspects of business interpreting.

Keywords: business interpreting, Dell Hymes, SPEAKING model, communicative event

要　旨

　会議通訳やコミュニティ通訳など他の通訳のカテゴリーと違い、ビジネス通訳に関する研究は多くない。これまでの通訳研究は、会議通訳に携わる通訳者の認知プロセスやスキルを研究対象としているため、どの通訳カテゴリーにおいても同じような仕事になるという誤解を生む可能性がある。実際には、これらの通訳カテゴリーによって、業務の性質や求められるスキルは大きく異なる。この事実は、通訳者の間ではよく理解されているものの、ビジネス通訳の性質や必要な能力を明確にする研究がほとんどないため、実務経験のない通訳学習者にとって、ビジネス通訳という職業は未だに謎である場合が多い。本研究では、言語学者のデル・ハイムズ氏による「SPEAKING モデル」というコミュニケーション能力に関するモデルを用いて、ビジネス通訳の分析を試みる。その上で、日本でのビジネス通訳に必要とされる通訳技術以外のスキルと、通訳者が直面する課題について述べる。本研究により、今後各種の通訳養成コースにビジネス通訳の社会的要素やコミュニケーション要素が取り入れられるようになることを期待したい。

キーワード：ビジネス通訳、デル・ハイムズ、SPEAKING モデル、コミュニケーション事象

1. Introduction

Language interpretation has as its aim the facilitation of oral or sign language communication. While the profession may be divided into a number of different groupings, for the purposes of this paper the following three categories are used: (1) conference interpreting (interpreting at a bilingual or multi-lingual conference), (2) community interpreting (interpreting in areas of the public sector such as legal, health and education services) and (3) business interpreting (interpreting in a company or other business setting). Research in the field of interpreting has, to date, focused predominantly on conference interpreting, and extensive efforts have been made to investigate the cognitive and neurological aspects of simultaneous interpreting—in other words, the cognitive processes used by interpreters as individuals (Gambier et al. 1997; Hansen et al. 2008). Over the past decade, community interpreting has also taken off as a new field of research, driven by an increased need for public sector interpreting in many countries and a new understanding of its challenges and potential (Vargas-Urpi 2012). Business interpreting, on the other hand, is prominent for the lack of attention received thus far. Indeed, generic explanations of 'interpreting' often lump conference interpreting and business interpreting together in the same category, and to the layperson the significant differences between the two may not be apparent. More importantly, graduates of interpreting schools and undergraduate or postgraduate interpreting courses in Japan are more likely to obtain their initial interpreting work in the business field than at an international conference. This would indicate that an understanding of business interpreting—its nature, requirements and challenges—is an absolute necessity for students of interpreting in Japan. The aim of this paper is to provide a framework for a clear and comprehensive description of business interpreting as it functions in Japan. A sociolinguistic perspective will be adopted; specifically, Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model will be used as a framework to describe the nature of business interpreting and the competencies required, particularly sociolinguistic aspects such as language variation, context and acquisition of sociolinguistic norms of different speech communities.

After a brief description of what is meant by 'business interpreting', we will then provide some background on the nature of interpreting research to date. This will be followed by an explanation of Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model of communicative competence, which will then be applied to the field of business interpreting, to form the basis for a discussion of the sociolinguistic aspects of this field. Through this study, we aim to identify the salient features of business interpreting and shed light on the complex role that business interpreters are called on to play. It is hoped that such features may be incorporated into interpreter training in the future, to ensure that prospective interpreters are fully equipped for interpreting work in the business realm.

2. Business Interpreting: A Multi-Faceted Role

The term 'business interpreting' as it is used in this paper refers to interpreting encounters that take place in privately owned companies. These may include company meetings, business negotiations, sales and marketing presentations, company training programs, technical explanation sessions, plant factory tours, shareholder meetings, board meetings and human resource assessments. Business interpreters are also often called upon to interpret at events held outside the company, including press conferences, product launches and media junkets. While the subject matter in question may be relatively constant for the business interpreter who is employed on a full-time basis in a particular department at a particular company, interpreting style needs to vary in line with the type of encounter and the participants—flexibility is clearly a requirement. Knowledge of the corporate policy, company jargon and business style and industry terminology are also needed. The requirements and challenges of business interpreting are discussed in greater detail below. Interpreters working in such business settings may be employed as full-time regular employees, set-term contract employees or recruited through an agency on a part-time basis.

3. Interpreting Research to Date

A review of research on interpreting to date highlights a number of trends, including (1) a focus on conference interpreting, in particular simultaneous interpreting (2) a focus on the ability, cognitive skills and state of the interpreter as individual, and (3) a bias toward prescriptive and normative texts regarding the activity of interpreting (see Gambier et al. 1997, Gile 2000, Hansen et al. 2008). There has been a disproportionately low level of attention paid to the communicative and social aspects of interpreting (notable exceptions are Linell in Gambier et al. 1997; Pym in Hansen et al. 2008; Shinzaki 2007), and concomitantly, to non-conference interpreting categories, such as business or community interpreting. This imbalance is beginning to be rectified, however, and research is starting to emerge that is more inclusive of other categories and aspects of interpreting. The complexity and multi-faceted nature of the role of interpreters in community settings, for instance, has been examined in depth by Cecilia Wadensjo and Claudia Angelelli, who promote a shift away from the prescriptive and normative nature of interpreting research toward a more communication-based approach that reflects the reality of work in the community interpreting field (see Angelelli 2000, 2004; Wadensjo 1998). Multi-party interpreter-mediated communication and the complexity and challenges of the business interpreter's role have also been the subject of research (Gurner 2001; Takimoto & Koshiba 2009), research that effectively illuminates the position of the interpreter as an element of a group participating in a communicative event.

4. Dell Hymes' SPEAKING Model

The American linguist Dell Hymes proposed 'ethnography of speaking' as the name for the study of the speech characteristics of particular groups. This was later extended and renamed ethnography of communication. Hymes' original model was intended as a functionalist counter to Noam Chomsky's generative grammar, introduced as part of his theory of linguistic competence (Saville-Troike 1991). Hymes disagreed with the distinction made by Chomsky between linguistic competence (knowledge of grammatical rules) and linguistic performance (actual language use in context), proposing that socially situated performance is the true measure of communicative competence (Hymes 1974).

To examine communication in action in a systematic and describable way, Hymes proposed that the study of the language of a particular culture or group could be categorized into the following units: speech community, speech situation, speech event, communicative act, communicative style and ways of speaking (Gumperz & Hymes 1986: 53-58). The primary unit of speech community, which is applied in this paper to groups participating in situations where interpreting is used, is fundamentally defined as people who share rules regarding when and how to speak, and how such speech is interpreted, or understood. Hymes devised the SPEAKING model, a tool that may be used to analyze any one of the units noted above. SPEAKING is an acronym for Situation, Participants, Ends, Acts, Key, Instrumentality, Norms and Genres (Gumperz & Hymes 1986: 59-66). Definitions are provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1. SPEAKING model definitions

Situation	The setting and the scene in which the speaking activities take place: setting refers to the time and place, while scene refers to the psychological setting of the event as it is understood by the people involved.
Participants	The people involved in the speaking activities, roles they play and relationships between them.
Ends	The purpose of the communicative event itself as well as the goals of those involved.
Act sequence	The form and order of the event.
Key	The key or tone of the communicative event, including the manner in which it is conducted and the level of formality.
Instrumentality	The linguistic and non-linguistic tools used to make the speech acts/communication act possible. This includes the form or style of speech used in the encounter.
Norms	The norms and rules adopted regarding acts of communication and the way they are understood or interpreted. This includes the way participants act and react to what has been said—in other words, what is considered socially acceptable at the event.
Genres	Categories or types of speech act and communicative event.

The eight elements described here do not exist discretely but rather are interrelated. Hymes applied his model to the analysis of speech communities, and advocated that knowledge of context, in addition to vocabulary and grammar, is a key element in the achievement of communicative

competence. Here we will apply the model to business situations where interpreting is used.

5. A Framework for Ethnographic Studies of Business Interpreting

It is the focus of Hymes' model on context and other social elements of speech acts that would suggest its applicability to situations involving interpretation, in particular, business interpreting events. Claudia Angelelli effectively used Hymes' framework to describe community interpreting settings (2000); here, we apply Hymes' SPEAKING model to business interpreting situations, in an attempt to characterize the various features of the communication involved, and add context to what would otherwise be purely linguistic analysis. Table 2 provides an initial definition of the SPEAKING model categories as they pertain to interpreting in business situations.

Table 2. SPEAKING model definitions applied to business interpreting

SPEAKING model category	General definitions for business interpreting
Situation	The setting may be any time throughout the day or night, within or outside regular business hours of a company, in company conference rooms, offices or related facilities such as plants or external presentation venues. The scene, or overall mood or context, may range from serious, to conversational to humorous.
Participants	Participants in the event, their roles and the relationships between them will vary in accordance with the type of event (see Situation). Differences in roles and relationships will be particularly pronounced depending on whether or not all participants belong to the same company or organization.
Ends	In accordance with the great variety of type of event (see Situation), the goals of individual participants, purpose of the event and expected outcomes of the event will also differ. For example, while the purpose of an internal departmental meeting may be to brainstorm ideas for the next product or strategy, the aim of a press conference at a product launch would be to present and explain the features of the product concerned in the most attractive way possible.
Act sequence	The order of the event may be formally prescribed in an agenda distributed to all participants and controlled by the meeting organizer/chairperson, or may be a free discussion with few or no rules on who will speak and when. The act sequence may be dictated by the level of familiarity between participants, or the level of formality of the occasion.
Key	The tone and level of formality of business events involving interpreting also vary greatly, depending on: level of familiarity between participants, type of event and purpose of the event. Events may range from an informal meeting between members of the same department or group, held in a casual tone, to a board meeting that includes external corporate auditors or other external parties, held with a high degree of formality.
Instrumentality	Languages used in business communication in Japan are most commonly Japanese and English, although other languages may also be used. In such situations, interpretation services in the form of simultaneous, consecutive or 'whispered' [1] interpreting are often used. Some companies have conference rooms equipped with interpreters' booths for simultaneous interpretation of larger meetings. Alternatively, individual headset and receiver equipment may be used for simultaneous interpretation of smaller meetings.

1) 'Whispering' is the term used to refer to the mode of interpreting where the interpreter provides simultaneous interpreting for one or two participants in a low voice or 'whisper'. No interpreting equipment (such as interpreter booths, headsets or microphones) is used.

	The form or style of speech used in communicative events in business will also vary greatly depending on level of formality of the occasion and level of familiarity between participants. Nonverbal communication cues may be very important in interpreter-mediated communication, and include: facial expressions, nods or shakes of head, posture and gestures. There are a number of gestures, in particular, that are specific to Japanese or Western culture respectively and may need to be understood by the interpreter to ensure smooth communication. Other instruments used for communication may be: agendas, meeting facilitators, meeting materials, projectors and screens. Video/audio-conferencing equipment is used for video/audio-conferences.
Norms	The rules for communication, or what is considered socially acceptable at a business interpreting event, may vary in accordance with the following: number of participants, level of familiarity between participants, the existence of an agenda and/or facilitator, the level of formality of the meeting, and the instruments used for communication (interpretation, video/audio-conferencing equipment). Norms regarding the use of interpreters may or may not be known/shared amongst participants.
Genres	Categories or types of speech acts and communicative events will vary widely, ranging from internal departmental meetings, interdepartmental meetings, audio/video conferences with overseas partners or affiliates, meetings with external parties such as suppliers or vendors, to board meetings and press conferences. Consequently, the type of speech act may also range from small or large one-way presentations to structured or free discussions involving multiple participants.

6. A Description of Business Interpreting: Required Skills

At the current point in time, a large portion of interpreting instruction in Japan is devoted to linguistic and technical instruction; in other words, students learn methods to acquire and utilize language skills and are taught the techniques required to interpret in consecutive and simultaneous modes. This would appear to be the case at private interpreting schools as well as undergraduate and graduate interpreting programs at universities.

The point of applying Hymes' SPEAKING model to interpretation in business settings is to illuminate the wide variety of situations that a business interpreter will encounter, the complexity of the role that s/he is likely to be expected to play, and from there, identify some of the specific skills that s/he will need to undertake such a role successfully.

In light of the features of business interpreting described with reference to the SPEAKING model above, below is a list of indicators that may be used to measure a business interpreter's communicative competence in terms of socially-situated performance—or, in other words, a list of the skills/elements required to perform successfully as a business interpreter. As this may or may not apply to business interpreting situations in other countries, the items proposed below are limited to business interpreting situations in Japan.

(1) Linguistic flexibility

- The ability to shift from formal to informal register and anywhere in-between
- The ability to change one's speech style in line with the style of the person being interpreted. This may include: persuasive, argumentative, humorous, formal announcement.
- The ability to change one's level of linguistic politeness in accordance with the membership of the communication event concerned — in other words in accordance with the roles of each participant and the relationships between them. This is particularly important in Japan where relative status of participants defines the vocabulary, syntax and tone to be used.

(2) Contextual knowledge

- The ability to obtain and utilize background information pertinent to discussions to be interpreted
- The ability to understand references to background information
- The ability to learn and understand references to the corporate mission, policies and historical information of the company concerned and use where applicable

(3) Judgment

- The ability to perceive and understand the roles and relationships between participants — in other words, the hierarchy of the gathering — and change one's register, level of politeness and speaking style accordingly.
- The ability to perceive when communication is no longer successfully taking place: in other words, when participating parties are not understanding one another. In some cases this may also mean the ability to judge whether or not additional explanations may be required to facilitate communication.
- The ability to 'read between the lines' in informal situations when the details may not always be stated.

(4) Technical flexibility

- The ability to change one's interpreting style in accordance with the wishes of the interpreting client (s). This may signify providing a summarized interpretation of comments as the meeting proceeds, providing a summary at the end of a meeting, or on the other hand interpreting all details of a meeting including asides, 'internal' discussions and informal comments.
- The ability to change the speed and/or style of one's interpreting in line with clients' requests.

(5) Negotiation skills

- The ability to discuss with participants and meeting organizers to ensure that conditions are met for the successful and sustainable provision of interpreting. This may include

negotiation for interpreting equipment such as individual headsets and microphone, negotiation for a partner interpreter to be assigned to ensure that a single interpreter is not interpreting alone for hours on end, and negotiation for meetings to be facilitated to ensure that proceedings are controlled and the interpreter is not expected to perform the physically impossible feat of interpreting for two or more people speaking at the same time.

- This may be summarized as the ability to educate interpreting clients.

(6) Coordination skills[2]

- The ability to coordinate with meeting participants and/or other interpreters to define the role of the interpreter in that particular instance and organize a successful and sustainable means to provide interpretation as needed

- The ability to intermediate between participants when it is perceived that communication is no longer successfully taking place. This may include the provision of additional explanations to supplement understanding.

Some (in the case of community interpreting, many) of the competencies listed above are also required for other types of interpreting, and it should be noted that this research is not intended as a call to recognize the supreme difficulty or otherwise of business interpreting over other groups in the interpreting profession. Rather, we aim here to draw attention to the non-technical skills required in business interpreting, which we believe can and should be incorporated into interpreting instruction. Sociolinguistic aspects such as language variation, context and acquisition of sociolinguistic norms of different speech communities loom large in business interpreting settings and their importance cannot be ignored. While it may be the case that some of these competencies cannot be taught (Kasper 1997), awareness is the first step, and the provision of practical learning opportunities to develop such awareness and encourage the development of competency in these skills would be beneficial not only in interpreter instruction but in any course designed to enhance the communicative competence of its students.

7. Next Steps

This paper proposes a theoretical framework that may be used to examine in greater detail various aspects of interpretation in business settings. Future areas for more in-depth examination may include: the acquisition of competence vis-à-vis organizational culture, the role of context in the occurrence of strategic omissions in business interpretation, non-technical roles required of business interpreters, business interpreter partnership dynamics, the ratio of polite to informal language styles used, and more. The challenges faced by business interpreters in Japan have been

2) See Baraldi and Gavioli (2012) for more extensive discussions on the complexity of the interpreter's role as coordinator.

discussed elsewhere (Gurner 2001) and the particular skill-set required has been highlighted here as an initial step in explorations of ways to meet such challenges. By defining the business interpreter as a participant in a communicative event, we hope that the social and contextual aspects of the business interpreting profession will be brought to the forefront for more effective interpreter and communication skill instruction in the future.

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