

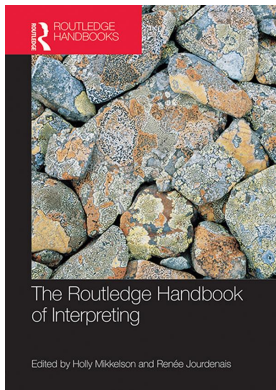
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The Routledge Handbook of Interpreting

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Conclusion

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CONCLUSION

Renée Jourdenais and Holly Mikkelson

The chapters in this book have provided an overview of the multifaceted field of interpreting, starting with the history of the profession, a discussion of key players and an analysis of key research, and moving on to how interpreting is practiced, assessed and taught. Along the way, the reader has been introduced to the different interpreting modes and settings, ethical issues, applications of technology and other professional concerns. It is clear from what is presented here that the field of interpreting is growing increasingly complex and specialized.

Despite the great variety in the venues where interpreters work and the differing expectations others have of them, this book also highlights a number of commonalities: all interpreters, regardless of where and how they work, must be acutely aware of ethics and of professional issues such as working conditions, relationships with interlocutors, the application of technology, and vicarious trauma. Similarly, the findings of research in one aspect of the field may be applicable to many others as well. Consequently, there is considerable overlap among the chapters as they address the role of the interpreter, user expectations, interpreters' professional status, quality standards, research findings and interpreter education.

Part I of the book has shown that interpreting has occurred across the millennia on all continents, and interpreters have participated in almost all major events in human history. Baigorri has not only described the contributions of interpreters throughout history, but he has also identified patterns and made conclusions about the development of the field. He has also emphasized the critical role played by memoirs in providing a record of historic events from different perspectives. In this very first chapter of the book, we have witnessed the evolution of technology as applied to interpreting, an issue that emerges repeatedly in later chapters. Boéri and García-Beyaert have shed light on how the profession has been shaped by interpreters themselves and their professional associations, on the one hand, and by government and international institutions and policymakers, on the other hand. We have seen the impact of power disparities and market forces on the profession, and discovered the importance of cross-pollination among practitioners of multiple professions in ensuring that communication takes place. The latter theme recurs in Pöchhacker's discussion of research when he stresses the need for an interdisciplinary approach to exploring all the facets of the interpreting process. He also warns of the dangers of the "technologization" of interpreting while also reminding us of the new avenues of research opened up by new technologies.

We have been introduced to the different modes of interpreting in Part II of this volume, each with its own unique features and challenges. Nonetheless, similarities are also apparent in the discussions of technology, for example. Seeber has explored simultaneous interpreters' adaptation to changing technology, and transformations brought about by technological innovations have also been mentioned by Takeda and Russell with respect to consecutive interpreting and by Chen with respect to sight translation. The entire practice of transcription and translation, as Valero-Garcés has illustrated, is dependent on the use of technology, and the globalization that goes hand in hand with technological development has increased the need for multilingualism in research, journalism, entertainment and criminal investigations. With all the new applications of transcription and translation, practitioners are becoming increasingly specialized, a phenomenon that is noted in other chapters as well.

Also in Part II, the implications of communicating in visual or signed languages have been explored. In Bontempo's chapter, issues of technology and globalization arise once again as she discusses the history of sign language interpreting and the evolving role of the Deaf community. She demonstrates the impact that the users of interpreting services can have on the professionalization of the field, and notes how market forces influence the practice of the profession in a variety of ways. Bontempo brings up some aspects of sign language interpreting that distinguish it from spoken language interpreting (such as repetitive stress injuries), while Napier, revisiting those differences, also emphasizes the similarities in the issues faced by sign language and spoken language interpreters alike.

Moving on from the modes of interpreting, in Part III we have explored the various settings in which interpreters perform their work. Once again, recurring issues can be seen regardless of whether the interpreting is done in an international conference, a courtroom, a hospital, a school or even a battle zone. Diriker returns to the professionalization issues mentioned earlier by Boéri and García-Bayaert, examining how they have come into play in different international venues, and she brings up the challenges posed by the large number of languages that must be accommodated at international gatherings, contrasted with the use of English as a global language. The need to address a multiplicity of languages is also mentioned in the chapters on court, asylum, community and medical interpreting, as these occur primarily in countries with large immigrant populations. Diriker's discussion of standard setting for conference interpreting is also echoed in the following chapters, as interpreters in each setting tailor standards to their specific needs without abandoning the fundamental principles of quality interpreting. Other recurring themes throughout Part III, mentioned in particular by Lee in connection with court interpreting, Pöllabauer with asylum proceedings, Bancroft with community venues, Roat and Crezee with healthcare interpreting, and Bot with mental health interpreting, are the tension between cost-efficiency and quality, new applications of technology (especially with respect to remote interpreting), establishing role boundaries, and the need for both interpreter and client education. Smith's analysis of interpreting in educational settings has brought us back to the role of external and internal players in shaping the profession, particularly with respect to legislation and government policies. Smith has also reminded us of the critical impact interpreters have on the users of their services, in this case schoolchildren.

Two areas that have only recently appeared on the scene in discussions of the interpreting profession have been covered in the last two chapters of Part III, Castillo's piece on interpreting for the mass media and Moser-Mercer's analysis of interpreting in conflict zones. The complexity of the mass media today can be seen in the illustrative tables created by Castillo to guide us as he takes us on a world tour of all the situations in which this type of interpreting is performed, from breaking news to sports to entertainment and beyond. Moser-Mercer has painted a more somber picture of interpreting around the world as she focuses on the myriad challenges – some of them life-threatening – faced by interpreters in conflict zones.

In Part IV, a great variety of topics have been covered in the broad category of issues and debates, beginning with Ozolins's survey of the ethical standards applied in different sectors of interpreting. The ethical dilemmas raised in passing as Ozolins examines various codes and standards of practice come into sharp focus in Ndongo-Keller's compelling description of the vicarious trauma to which interpreters are exposed in many settings, though she discusses the specific case of interpreters in war crimes trials. We have then been able to figuratively step back from the very up-close-and-personal approach merited by Ndongo-Keller's topic as we moved on to Braun's chapter on remote interpreting, which revisits the technology issues alluded to previously by several authors. Braun's thorough analysis of the different applications of remote interpreting has highlighted the implications for interpreters themselves, in terms of working conditions and job satisfaction, as well as the impact on the effectiveness of communication among the parties involved.

Following up on the notion of effectiveness, Collados-Aís and García Becerra have helped us understand how the quality of an interpretation is defined and measured, and how varied the definitions of quality may be, depending on the perspective of the participant. In a similar vein, Jean Turner has introduced us to different types of assessment tools that can be used to measure quality or other constructs such as progress in training and readiness to enter the profession. Assessment is intimately associated with education, and Bao has shown us what prospective interpreters need to learn, how they learn it, and the different levels of training that exist throughout the world. In contrast, Martínez-Gómez has shed light on a field that has received very little attention to date despite the fact that it has existed since the dawn of time: non-professionals who end up providing interpreting services with no compensation and no training or preparation whatsoever. She discusses new research and suggests future avenues of inquiry in this field. The final chapter, Rudvin's analysis of professional identity, has shown us how various professions view and define themselves, and the barriers that lie in the way of interpreters as they struggle to achieve a unified identity that distinguishes the profession while at the same time accounting for all the different types of interpreting that make up the whole.

This book is but a snapshot of interpreting as it exists in 2014, or rather, an effort to capture one view through an ever-shifting kaleidoscope. It is evident from all the topics covered here that interpreting has a bright future, despite the adversities that have emerged and will continue to emerge in a world that is both shrinking to the size of a village and at the same time rebuilding the Tower of Babel. Although no one can say for sure what the field will look like a century or even a decade from now, the authors have identified a number of trends that are likely to continue into the coming years. We know that technology will not stop its headlong advance, and that interpreters will be significantly affected by the use of technology in communication and, more importantly, will contribute to its constant improvement. Care must be taken to avoid the dehumanization and the loss of quality that often accompany technological "improvements." In the future, the profession will no longer be pigeon-holed into rigid categories such as "conference interpreting" or "simultaneous interpreting," but will change its face as the communication needs of the world evolve. Public awareness of the profession will increase as professional associations become more sophisticated and influential, and those who rely on interpreters to conduct business and lead their lives will learn better ways of collaborating with them for effective communication. Just as the practice of interpreting will be shaped by globalization and technology, so will research in the field as new techniques and approaches are developed and the academic disciplines in which that research is carried out expand and blend. Interpreter training programs will grow in number, expand in scope and become more effective in producing the practitioners of the future.

As a result of all of these developments, we will have a clearer perception of the interpreting process, its impact on human interactions, how interpreting skills can be acquired and maintained, and how interpreters can continue to grow and reap rewards in the profession. We hope that the reader, having read just one or many or even all of the chapters in this volume, has come away with a better understanding of this fascinating field.