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From "Within" to "Beyond" in Interpreting Studies: Conceptualizing Interpreting as a Socio-political and Historical Shaping Force and a Source of Inter/trans-disciplinary Conviviality

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Abstract

While there have been recent calls for an "outward turn" in (written) translation studies, interpreting researchers have mostly taken an inward-looking view of interpreting and investigated it as a semi-closed system and an arguably self-interested practice from within. This is despite the fact that interpreting in various forms and settings has since time immemorial been a co-constructing factor in the transfer of knowledge and also a vital shaper of history, (geo)politics, culture, religion, communication, and our human civilization. Going from "within" to "beyond", this article conceptualizes interpreting as a consequential socio-political and historical shaping force and a source of inter/trans-disciplinary conviviality and argues for an outward turn in interpreting studies (IS). This article reviews a few pertinent recent studies with interdisciplinary and outward-looking features that have endeavoured to answer the important "so-what" question in IS. These studies highlight the vital role and far-reaching impact of interpreting and interpreters in shaping different spheres of human communication and civilization across time and space. The article also points out directions to move IS forward from a predominantly inward-looking practice. We argue that it is high time we ventured out of the comfort zone, got off the well-trodden path and took an outward-looking view of interpreting so that the sub-discipline can have more meaningful and mutually enriching dialogues with other disciplines and subject areas.

Keywords: interpreting studies; outward turn; interdisciplinarity; outward-looking

1. Introduction

Moving beyond the different levels of "equivalence" and a prescriptivist approach, translation studies has along the way witnessed its fair share of "turns" and "paradigm shifts" in its relatively short history. These, for example, include the "cultural turn" (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990) and the more recent "sociological turn" (Wolf and Fukari 2007) and "power turn" (Strowe 2013; Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002). Indeed, from the very genesis, given its essentially complex and multifaceted nature, translation studies was established as an "interdiscipline" (e.g. Snell-Hornby, Pöchhacker and Klaus 1994) that drew heavily on adjacent areas and neighbouring fields such as comparative literature, philosophy, and linguistics in general. However, while translation studies has never been a completely closed field, it must be recognized that the relationship so far between translation studies and other disciplines is largely a one-way process. That is, while the field has imported massively from other adjacent disciplines, it has, according to Zwischenberger (2019), rarely exported much so far. Particularly, in recent years, it has been increasingly recognized that translation studies

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risks becoming a self-contained, inward-looking, complacent and as a result isolated discipline as it has been so keen on being respected through establishing itself as a distinct field (Bassnett 2011; Vidal Claramonte 2019). Against such a backdrop, there have recently been calls for an "outward turn" in translation studies (Bassnett and Johnston 2019; Zwischenberger 2019) and the proposition of the idea of "post-translation studies" (Gentzler 2017). This is despite the fact that there are still opposing voices from scholars who take a narrow view of translation, for example, as relating to the more vocational and professional aspect as clearly recognized by van Doorslaer (2020).

The idea behind these new "outward" developments is that translation studies needs to be more open-ended, mobile, and engaged in fundamentally more trans-disciplinary dialogues (Nergaard and Arduini 2011). A number of interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary studies bearing traces of this outward turn in translation studies include Brownlie's (2021) article that focuses on the role of languaging, translanguaging and discursive cross-culturing as resources for the empowerment of Congolese women, Marais (2014; 2019)'s articles exploring the relationship between translation and development, and Todorova's (2018) study that explores the processes of translation and localization relating to civil society in the Southeast Europe setting, drawing specifically on experiences of civil society development in Macedonia. Similar interdisciplinary studies that broadly fall within this trend in translation studies also include various articles (Baker 2020; Buts 2020; Jones 2019; Karimullah 2020; Pérez-González 2020) that are part of the larger Genealogies of Knowledge project led by the University of Manchester. Well aligned with the trend of digital humanities, these articles have addressed the vital and complex role that translation and other forms of mediation play in guiding our understanding of key aspects of social and political life from various perspectives.

Compared with the significantly more explored and theorized written translation, for various reasons, interpreting studies (IS) represents a late comer, which has also witnessed a few "turns" (Pöchhacker 2008). Interpreting studies, from the outset, did not completely shy away from interdisciplinary attempts. Interpreting studies, like its written counterpart, has to some extent borrowed concepts, theories, and approaches from adjacent disciplines and further afield in order to help us gain more in-depth knowledge of the different aspects of interpreting from within. However, notably, the relationship is far from mutual and the contribution of IS to other disciplines and fields has been minimal (with only a few exceptions as mentioned in Section 4 below). Against such a broader context and in view of the so far largely inward-looking[1] nature of interpreting studies investigating interpreting as a largely self-interested practice, this article provides a relatively new conceptualization of interpreting studies that consolidates it as a (sub)discipline[2]. Looking beyond interpreting as a semi-closed system in an inward-looking manner (e.g., focusing on the various [inter]lingual elements and the interpreting practice, process, and profession *per se*), this article fundamentally argues for the need to conceptualize interpreting as a major driver and powerful shaping force in mediating and contributing to different external dimensions and facets of our world. A handful of interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary studies that

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[1] "Inward-looking" here should be understood in a relative sense, rather than an absolute one. As explained in more detail later, interpreting studies has so far mostly focused on the internal aspects and dimensions about the interpreting process, profession and practice from within. Indeed, IS has had "dialogues" with other disciplines, mostly through borrowing concepts, methods, and theories from different fields to help gain a deeper insight into interpreting. However, that relationship is more of a one-way dialogue, rather than a dynamic and mutually beneficial process.

[2] There are some debates whether interpreting studies is a standalone discipline or should be subsumed under translation studies. In this paper, the term "(sub)discipline" is used, following Pöchhacker (2008).

potentially fall within this outward turn in interpreting studies are discussed, which are studies that not only contribute to interpreting studies itself but also contribute considerably to other disciplines. This article goes on to explore a few possible future directions, avenues and topics that can potentially be subsumed under this new trend. It is hoped that this relatively new conceptualization can help us expand our horizon, get out of the disciplinary comfort zone, and get off the well-trodden path so as to discover the brave new world in the landscape of interpreting studies. Only in this way, this young (sub)discipline can truly move forward and have a wider impact.

2. Interpreting Studies: An Overview of its Perspectives and Approaches

Interpreting predates written translation by millennia (Cronin 2002) and has since time immemorial been practiced as a vital source of communication across linguistic, ethnic, religious and civilizational boundaries. However, despite such historical antiquity and current relevance, compared with its more established written counterpart, interpreting studies has been a relatively late starter and is significantly less researched. Traditionally, scholarly attention has largely focused on anecdotal or reflective accounts of interpreting from interpreters of different levels of experience and background (e.g., Dai 2004). Parallel to this, interpreting studies has also mostly examined the (inter)lingual and linguistic dimensions. Scholars have, for instance, focused on the different levels of "equivalence", interpreting error analysis, the "correct" strategies to adopt, the best and most accurate interpretation, and interpreting quality assessment, often taking a ST-oriented and/or prescriptivist view of interpreting.

Meanwhile, there is another major underlying theorization, perceiving interpreting as a semi-closed system and standalone process, product, practice and profession in its own right. Within this broader conceptualization, important topics have been explored relatively systematically in studies galore, drawing on different methodological approaches and theoretical perspectives. Interpreting scholars have explored topics that involve the various aspects and issues of the interpreting process such as note-taking (Chang 2015; Chen 2020), cognitive load (Plevoets and Defrancq 2018), working memory (Köpke and Nespoulous 2006; Wang 2016), terminology preparation (Xu 2018), multi-tasking (Strobach et al. 2015), accent (Cheung 2013), utterance fluency (Han et al. 2020), pauses (Wang and Li 2015), disfluency (Plevoets and Defrancq 2016), non-fluencies (Dayter 2021), such (universalist) interpreting features as interpretese (Shlesinger 2008) and explicitation (Gumul 2021; Tang and Li 2017), interpreting norms (Wallmach 2000), skill acquisition (Moser-Mercer 2008), interpreter competency and aptitude (Bontempo and Napier 2011), interpreting strategies (Li 2015a), ethnics in interpreting (Gil-Bardají 2020), interpreter training and teaching (Li 2015b; Liu 2005), interpreting quality assessment (Huang 2009), interpreting quality perception (Cheung 2015), professionalism (Bahadır 2010), the development of such interpreting associations and organizations as AIIC (Keiser 1999), and accreditation (Chen 2009; Ordóñez-López 2021).

Among these important studies, notably, a salient and dominant line of research so far takes an experimental approach (Gile 1998). Rather than using real-world interpreting data, this line of experimental research, according to Wang and Tang (2020), is usually "decontextualized" and draws on relatively small-scale data taken from a controlled laboratory setting. Often, the interpreting data are produced by language students or trainee interpreters instead of professional interpreters, not to mention real-life interpreting settings and socio-cultural contexts. Therefore, despite the seemingly scientific and rigorous research design, such an experimental approach may sometimes suffer from issues of ecological

validity (Mellinger and Hanson 2022), generalizability, and thus wider significance (Baekelandt and Defrancq 2021; Wang and Tang 2020).

Unlike this more experimental and decontextualized approach, IS has relatively recently started to focus on the interactive, communicative and mediated nature of interpreting notably in public service interpreting or dialogue interpreting in a range of different settings, often taking a descriptive and product-oriented approach to real-world data (Angelelli 2004; Mason 2001; Roy 2000; Wadensjö 1998; 2001). Drawing for example on Conversation Analysis, this line of research has established interpreters' active mediation and agency role in the triadic communication process (cf. Mason 2001) as legitimate and visible participants (Wadensjö 1998) and vital co-constructors (Berk-Seligson 1990). Without doubt, this represents a major shift from Reddy's (1979) conduit metaphor that interpreters are translating machines that are expected to "just translate, translate everything, translate adequately" (Wadensjö 1995, 115) without much agency. Drawing on authentic data, this line of research, given its clear focus on interpreter's agency and mediation, may be understood as a great improvement over previous (de)contextualized and prescriptive approaches in showing interpreters' actual involvement in a range of real-life settings. These studies essentially debunked the myth surrounding the role of interpreters. However, these studies, usually focusing on dialogues or interactions in one-off interpreting events, may still be seen as an approach looking from within (in the sense that they contribute minimally to other disciplines). This line of inquiry nevertheless has led to more and more empirical studies that draw on authentic interpreting data and arguably has paved the way for other more outward-looking approaches as discussed later.

Also challenging the traditional and long-held commonplace beliefs about interpreter being neutral and impartial are a range of studies which look at the (macro-)sociological aspects of interpreting. Viewing interpreting as a situated, contextualized, and interpersonal type of communication, these studies examine interpreting and interpreters' role through sociological lens. These involve exploring such topics as norms (Diriker 2004; Wang 2012) as well as drawing on Bourdieu's concepts *field*, *capital* and *habitus* (cf. Inghilleri 2003; Ren 2020) and the work of Anthony Giddens (Tipton 2008). Given the extensive (one-way) borrowing from other disciplines, these studies may still be viewed as containing considerable inward-looking elements, where the predominant focus is on better understanding interpreters and interpreting.

These product-oriented and socially-oriented research trends mentioned above have served as the precursors of a more hardcore (critical) line of research in interpreting focusing on such issues as mediation, manipulation, agency, power, representation, gender, identity, discourse, and ideology in various political, conflictual, sociocultural and institutional contexts. Partly in response to Cronin's call for a brand new "cultural" or "social" turn in interpreting studies to explicitly address questions relating to ideology and engage with such relevant issues as power, class, gender and race (Cronin 2002: 387), this more critical line of research involves a narrative approach or a (critical) discourse analytical approach. In a narrative approach (Baker 2010; Boéri 2008), interpreters are believed to play a crucial role in both disseminating and contesting (public) narratives within and across national boundaries (Baker 2006).

Similarly, taking a constructivist view of language, (critical) discourse analysis is also used to explore interpreters' discursive and ideological mediation in a wide range of political and institutional settings. Within this relatively new area, qualitative critical discourse analysis has been carried out notably in a European setting (Beaton 2007; Beaton-Thome 2010, 2013; Schäffner 2012). For example, Beaton's (2007) and Beaton-Thome's (2010)

studies illustrated how the EU's institutional hegemony and ideological discourse at the European Parliament are further reinforced by the simultaneous interpreters through using various linguistic devices and discursive means (e.g. repetition, metaphor strings, and personal pronouns).

More recently, in view of the fact that manual CDA analysis often may lack objectivity, systematicity and representativeness (Billig 2008; Stubbs 1997; Widdowson 1998), a corpus-based CDA approach has been increasingly applied to the investigation of interpreters' agency and ideological mediation in various settings. These data-based studies have, inter alia, systematically explored China's interpreter-mediated political press conferences (Wang and Feng 2018; Gu 2018; 2019; 2020a; Gu & Tipton 2020; Li 2018; Hu & Meng 2018) and other high-profile diplomatic settings such as the Summer Davos (Gao 2020; 2021). Given the fact that research "on ideology and interpreting is still in its infancy" (Martin 2016, 239), these empirical corpus-based CDA studies represent a welcome move in examining issues of power and ideology *within* interpreting and in looking at interpreting itself as a dynamic, situated, interactive, communicative and mediated social activity. However, despite the welcome change, some of these recent studies, while recognizing the sociocultural, political, and ideological aspects and the essentially mediated nature of interpreting, still tend to focus predominantly on the interpreting itself, with limited attention to the more dynamic interactions between interpreting and the "external" aspects, facets and elements of our world.

In other words, interpreting, by and large, has thus far been perceived in a more or less narrow and inward-looking way as a semi-closed system, process and practice in its own right that is relatively independent of the broader contexts. This is perhaps understandable, given that IS as a relatively new sub-discipline needed to explore different aspects and processes of interpreting from within and establish its identity in the early days.

3. Towards an Outward Turn in IS: Conceptualizing Interpreting as a Vital Sociopolitical and Historical Shaping Force and a Source of Inter/trans-disciplinary Conviviality

The literature review above has established that, despite the rapid developments in recent years, interpreting studies is still very much explored as a semi-closed and self-interested practice in a relatively self-sufficient manner, without engaging adequately with the impact of interpreting on other external elements in our world. A closer look at interpreting-mediated international diplomacy and politics, for instance, would reveal that the current inward-looking perspective of interpreting is far from being sufficient for a complete account of the complexity of interpreted events and their potentially far-reaching impact on different levels.

For example, in 2021, high-level U.S.-China talks were held in Anchorage, Alaska, representing the first major face-to-face encounter between the Chinese side and officials from the Biden administration amid a broader context of tensions and conflict between the two superpowers. This meeting was mediated by two female interpreters from both sides. Notably, deviating from the common practice, China's top diplomat unexpectedly delivered a lengthy response to the U.S. delegation's opening remarks, without pausing for the interpreter to render his statements into English until the very end. When reminded that his message needed to be interpreted, he responded and asked whether this was necessary. There are multiple ways to view the roles of the interpreter in this example. For instance, the presence of the interpreter gave him an excuse to speak at length in Chinese in front of the U.S.

delegation. His intended audience may have been domestic Chinese listeners in China. The lengthy remarks also showcased the Chinese interpreter's ability to perform consecutive interpreting for an extended period of time. This, to some extent, potentially also demonstrated the superiority of the Chinese interpreter over her U.S. counterpart and by extension also the great strength of China's diplomacy in general as a rising power. Furthermore, the extra media attention the Chinese interpreter received from both China, the US and around the world added another layer of interest to the interpreter-mediated event. The performance of the interpreter on such occasions may well have a fundamental impact on the dynamics of the meeting *per se* and may as a result effect change in terms of the two countries' bilateral ties and geopolitics and history in general.

This example from the high-stakes setting of diplomacy and politics points to such issues as symbolism, diplomatic power, rhetoric, institutional identity and affiliation, patriotism, and targeted communication, beyond just faithfulness and accuracy at a linguistic level and individual interpreting processes (e.g. note-taking and working memory). As can be seen from such diplomatic and political events with high stakes, interpreting is a key venue that not only involves linguistic issues but also entangles with politics, diplomacy, power, and conflicts in a complicated way. This therefore points towards a glaring lack of macro-level theorization that looks beyond this inward-looking perspective from "within". This also highlights the need to further expand the remit of interpreting and focus on the vital shaping, enabling, empowering, and transformative role of interpreting and interpreters in effecting change in different aspects and dimensions of our increasingly complex world. This new outward-facing conceptualization opens up new doors and permits more engaged and inter/transdisciplinary investigations into the role of interpreting as a shaper of the trajectory of the human race that might concern historical contact, civilizational knowledge exchanges, intercultural communication, international diplomacy and politics, the spread of religions, socio-political changes and transformations, wars and conflicts, peace-making, and ultimately human development. As interpreting studies has come of age after decades of development, it is necessary and vital to expand IS beyond the traditional foci to forge more open, dynamic, intellectually stimulating and forward-looking interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary partnerships and dialogues with other fields and disciplines, such as anthropology, history, diplomacy, the social and political sciences, media and journalism, global studies and development studies, as illustrated in Figure 1. According to Wang (2018), there are various approaches to TIS. This outward turn advocated here is more or less in line with the pragmatic and communicative approach as well as the socio-cultural approach articulated by him that are attentive to the communicative and external social aspects of our world.
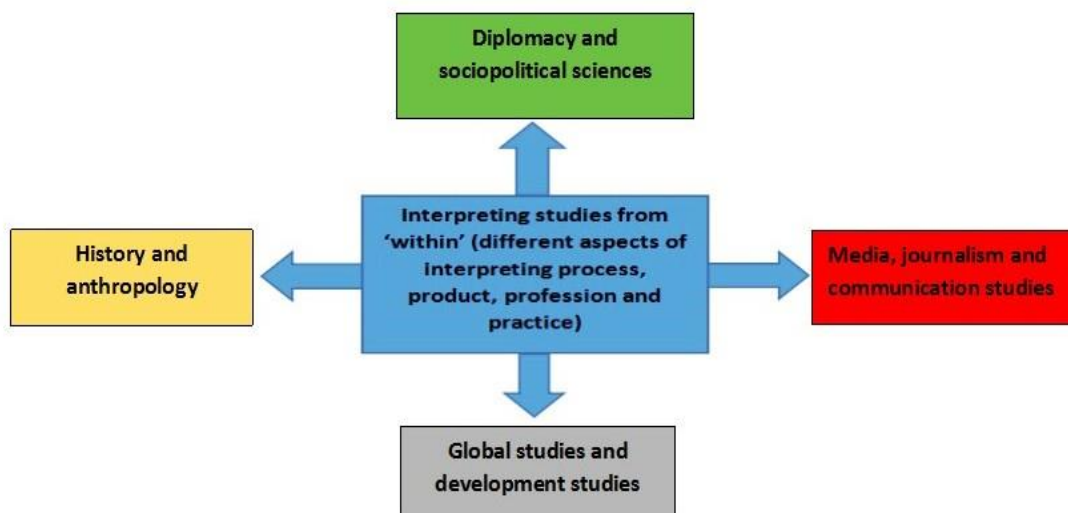
Figure 1: Win-win dialogues between an outward-looking IS and other disciplines

Admittedly, IS research may be seen as operating on a continuum and some are more inward-looking and some are more outward-looking. Those more inward-looking studies might also have an interdisciplinary element and involve contributions from other disciplines in order to help us gain additional insights into interpreting from within (e.g., those using neuroimaging tools). However, **one of the defining hallmarks of an outward-looking IS is the involvement of a significant amount of collaboration and, more importantly, contributions to other disciplines and fields**, rather than just focusing on interpreting as a process, practice and profession in a self-interested way. Given the essentially outward and mutually enriching nature of this proposed line of research, it promises to help us push disciplinary boundaries and answer the all-important "so-what" question from a more interdisciplinary perspective. Arguably, there are finite aspects and elements to interpreting *per se*. That is, after knowing the internal dimensions and aspects that are important to interpreting performance, process, and training, interpreted texts might exhibit certain common or universalist features, and the fact that interpreting is often not ideologically neutral, etc., a natural and obvious question to ask is where do we go from here?

This is indeed a valid question because interpreting as a special type of translation is by definition about the facilitation of communication between different languages/varieties and cultures and in different socio-political contexts and settings over certain historical periods (House 2016; Valdeón 2021). In other words, interpreting is ultimately a vital instrument and an important means to an end, rather than an end in itself. The value of the "means" must be judged by its impact on the "end". Precisely for this reason, the outward turn for interpreting studies seems to be the answer and is a natural step and inevitable path when different internal aspects of interpreting are being more or less explored and exhausted from within. Arguably, it is only when interpreting is explored *vis-à-vis* other external subjects, disciplines and areas in a symbiotic and mutually enhancing manner that its broader impact and real-world relevance can be truly felt.

Unlike previous turns (e.g., cultural turn and sociological turn) and research trends (e.g., digital humanities related research) which seemingly advocate TIS research to shift to one particular direction or methodological approach all of a sudden, what is advocated here is more of an important conceptual and broad attitudinal change from the one that we have been taken for granted and been so used to for a long time. As opposed to being a strictly

prescriptivist call that IS should go into only one particular direction, the current outward view towards IS is supposed to be horizon-broadening and enabling. As such, under this relatively new conceptualization, researchers are emboldened and empowered to explore multiple topics and directions simultaneously relating to various aspects of human existence, intercultural communication, and civilizational exchanges beyond the previous narrow views of interpreting *per se* in an inward-looking fashion. Methodologically, given the wide range of potential topics that can be explored, various methodological approaches can be adopted, ranging from qualitative to quantitative and from inductive and deductive.

4. Emerging Inter/trans-disciplinary Studies that Have Looked Outwards in IS

Having conceptualized interpreting from a relatively new perspective, a few existing inter/trans-disciplinary studies from different socio-political contexts, historical backgrounds and geographical locales that encouragingly have headed in this direction are discussed here. These few extant studies have intersected with and contributed to such areas and disciplines as history, diplomacy, the social and political sciences, as well as media, journalism, and communication studies. These for example include Lung's (2006) study on how an interpreter shaped historical records in Latter Han China, Lung's (2016) study exploring Sillan interpreters in first-millennium East Asian exchanges, Gaiba's (1999) study examining the effect of interpreting on the proceedings at the Nuremberg Trial, Guo's (2015) study investigating into the vital role of Chinese interpreters who interpreted for the enemy in the course of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1931-1945), Jager's (2015) study focusing on Indian women like La Malinche that served as interpreters and language mediators to help colonial powers achieve their economic and political goals during the European empires' colonial conquests, Wolf's (2016) study which systematically investigated a significantly under-explored part of the Holocaust that is the crucial role of interpreting and language in general in Nazi concentration camps, and Davies (2022)'s work exploring interpreting and interpreter at the First Frankfurt Auschwitz Trial. Similarly, Wang and Xu's (2016) micro-historical study has focused on the role of interpreting in shaping the trajectory and process of the Korean armistice negotiations. Wang and Tang's (2018) study has explored the consequential role of interpreting and interpreters in the early Sino-British contacts in the 18th and 19th century. It is conventional wisdom and taken-for-granted belief that history has largely been written by kings, emperors, presidents and other important movers and shakers (e.g. Napoleon, Queen Victoria, the Prophet Muhammad, Genghis Khan, Mao Zedong, and Adolf Hitler). While this might still be true to some extent, these interdisciplinary studies highlight the vital role of interpreting and interpreters in shaping the trajectory of history in various ways. Without them, the world as we know it today would not be the same. In other words, interpreting is in many cases the "missing link" or the missing parts of the jigsaw. A more outward-looking IS can without doubt help connect the dots and enable us to have a richer and more holistic and balanced view of human history.

Relating to diplomacy and political sciences, Gu's (2020b) corpus-based study explores the vital shaping role of the interpreter-mediated discourse in English in (re)presenting various geopolitical actors and mediating socio-political knowledge and shaping public perception in terms of whether the US is China's friend, foe or perhaps enemy. Gu's (2022) interdisciplinary study examines interpreters' crucial facilitating role in (re)constructing and conveying China's broader reform and opening-up metadiscourse or meta-narrative and as a result in (re)telling the Chinese story. At the intersection of interpreting, media and journalism, Zheng and Ren (2018)'s interdisciplinary research investigates the vital role of interpreting as an influencing factor on news reports, focusing on interpreted Chinese

political discourse recontextualized in English language news. Similarly, Gu and Wang's (2021) interdisciplinary study conceptualizes the interpreter-mediated discourse as a vital source of "meaning potential", which forms a starting point of a discursive chain in the global news production and sociopolitical knowledge dissemination process across different genres and media platforms. Drawing on various theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches (e.g., micro-historical analysis, corpus linguistics, and critical discourse analysis), these interdisciplinary studies have shown how interpreting might be explored in a systematic, robust, socially engaged and often data-based manner as a socio-political and historical shaping force and as a vital source that contributes powerfully to other disciplines.

5. Future Directions, Avenues, and Topics to Explore

Given the fact that interpreting studies can be seen as an interdiscipline, it is inevitably linked with other fields and areas. By looking from "within" to "beyond", inevitably, more efforts are needed to establish the relationship and nexus between interpreting, history, migration studies, diplomacy and the political sciences in general, journalism and media studies, etc. Similarly, more focused attention is needed to explore the significant role of interpreting and interpreters in the conveyance and shaping of major narratives and taken-for-granted truths, facts, and knowledge across languages and cultures. To this end, it behoves IS researchers to be more open-minded, bolder, and more determined to think outside the box and embrace this attitudinal and conceptual change. This section sets out a few future directions, avenues, and topics that can be subsumed under this relatively new approach to interpreting. Among these, some of the topics might be from an anthropological, historical, sociolinguistic, religious, geopolitical, discursive, communicative, and public health crisis management perspective.

For instance, from the perspective of religious, civilizational and people-to-people exchanges, it is worth exploring the role of oral interpreting in the spread of religions (e.g., Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism) between geographically adjacent regions and the role of oral interpreting and language contact in general along major civilizational routes (e.g. the ancient silk road). Similarly, efforts can be made to study the first contacts of human and explore how various ethnic and linguistic groups used language (including interpreting to different degrees) for communication and also to investigate how they might have gradually settled for a *lingua franca* and/or used various coping strategies such as code-switching/translanguaging for ease of communication. In terms of sociolinguistics, interpreting, as a form of interlingual and intercultural communication, may slowly also help contribute to language change (e.g. in vocabulary, syntax, semantics) and the development of new linguistic varieties (e.g. English routinely rendered from formulaic political discourse in Chinese may represent a new kind or genre of "world English").

From a historical perspective, alongside the already extensively studied major movers and shakers, it would be interesting to explore interpreters' role in shaping the trajectory of human history at various critical junctures in different historical contexts (e.g., the British Raj, the development of the Straits Settlements, the world wars, Sino-Japanese wars, the Opium war, the negotiations in the run-up to the Hong Kong hand-over in 1997, China's entry into the WTO, climate change talks, and the recent Ukraine crisis). China, for example, represents a particularly interesting and fertile object of study, which permits researchers to explore how interpreting and interpreters have contributed to China's historical developments over time in key watersheds from ancient China all the way to the rise of modern China and its current exercise of power around the world. This is particularly relevant, given China's increasingly prominent role in geopolitics, economy, etc. Similarly, attention might be

focused on the shaping role of interpreting in various forms in the nation-building of newly independent countries against a backdrop of decolonialization and self-determination (e.g., in ethnolinguistically diverse Malaysia where multiple ethnic groups did not necessarily share a common national language before "merdeka" or independence was shouted/declared in the new nation in 1957).

From the perspective of the dissemination and (re)construction of discourse and knowledge, it might be interesting to explore how interpreters contribute to the conveyance and dissemination of major meta-narratives (e.g., enlightenment, democracy, freedom, capitalism, war on terror, reform and opening-up) across languages, cultures and peoples. Similarly, it is useful to see how interpreters and interpreting might play a role in spreading, promoting, and consolidating (positive) ideals, in helping level the playing field, and in resisting and combating injustice, stereotypes, discrimination and other social ills as a source of positive shaping force for the better (e.g., black lives matter). To this end, positive discourse analysis (PDA) might be applied to IS research.

In the context of media and journalism, interpreters and interpreting also play an important role. This is of particular relevance in a fast-moving, globalized and interconnected world, where world leaders' addresses might be simultaneously interpreted into Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese, Modern Standard Arabic, Hindi, Urdu, French, German, Spanish, and Portuguese. The interpreted message, accurate or not, will in turn become the new "source discourse" and new "point of departure" for endless new news reports, newsroom discussions, and even feeds on social media sites (e.g. Twitter/X, Instagram, Facebook and TikTok). As such, the interpreting product becomes the very starting point of a new and ongoing discursive chain (Gu and Wang 2021). In the most benign way, interpreting plays a vital facilitating and enabling role in intercultural and interlingual communication. However, this might equally lead to intercultural (mis)communication, give rise to misunderstanding, contribute to the spread of "fake news" and rumours, stir up nationalism, foster hatred and animosity between nations and peoples, and lead to a widening of the (ideological) division between different sides, political parties, and even sections of the same society.

Similarly, from the perspective of geopolitics and diplomacy, it is interesting to explore how interpreters might mediate in the process, contribute to the constantly shifting power relations between major global powers, and effect change within a regional and broader geopolitical context. Also, it is worth examining interpreters' role in the image (re)construction and discursive (re)presentation of various geopolitical and social actors. The defaming and glorifying of different sides can be vital in shaping public opinions in a world that increasingly depends on image and soft power in winning the hearts and minds of people and the international community.

From the vantage point of global development and governance, it would be of interest to explore the instrumental role of interpreters in facilitating the development of the global south and bridging the North-South divide alongside various policies, structures, and initiatives within various NGOs and governmental organizations. For instance, institutional interpreters can be studied in order to establish their role in helping achieve the Millennium Development Goals or MDGs using their language skills and linguistic repertoire.

Also of particular relevance is the medical and public health setting. At a time of a global pandemic (e.g. Covid-19), interpreting plays a vital role in sharing information across-linguistically and as a result indirectly contributing to the global solutions. For example, it is worth investigating how interpreters might help facilitate the communication of medical and scientific know-how, bring experts from around the world together, promote the

exchange and sharing of best practices between nation states (or at times even cause misunderstandings in the process). Also, at a more grass-roots level, our societies are becoming increasingly superdiverse and multilingual against a backdrop of globalization and increased mobility (Cronin & Simon 2014; Koskinen 2014). However, the Covid-19 pandemic has shown that many societies are ill-prepared for people's multilingual needs and important messages often are only available in major or official languages (cf. Hopkyns and van den Hoven 2022). As a result, this can lead to disaster linguicism or language-based discrimination (Uekusa 2019) for ethnolinguistic minorities. Going forward, more engaged and interdisciplinary research on interpreting and also multilingual communication in general can prove vital in handling public health crises and other disasters in the future (Gu 2023a, 2023b). In other words, interpreting is an important part of a place's (multilingual) communication repertoire in its crisis and disaster management.

Also, interpreters here do not have to be well-trained professional interpreters in high-profile settings such as the EU and the UN. The role and impact of amateur and volunteer interpreters and even bilingual children as interpreters might also be more closely examined. For example, the existence of volunteer interpreters can facilitate communication and improve or sometimes hinder the social and cultural integration of asylum seekers, refugees and new immigrants in the new host country. Likewise, second generation bilingual children may effectively serve as interpreters to help their parents or grandparents get things done and better navigate through life in a new community and society. Arguably, the seemingly casual, relaxed and informal way of interpreting at a grass-roots level can cumulatively play an equally important role in knowledge construction and the shaping of an individual's worldview and lived experience in a specific geographical locale in a seemingly naturalized, undetectable and taken for granted manner. In this regard, interpreting might be intimately linked with various relevant sociological topics such as identity, belonging, social integration and participation.

Furthermore, traditionally, interpreting is mostly taken to be between formally defined major languages by default (e.g., between Chinese and English and between Arabic and French). As a matter of fact, intralingual interpreting between mutually unintelligible "dialects" or varieties of the same language (e.g., Mandarin and Cantonese and geographically distant varieties of Arabic) has also been widely practiced for the sake of (intralingual) communication. As such, it might be interesting to explore the place of intralingual interpreting in the spread, dissemination, and consolidation of folklore, traditions, collective memories, and as a result in helping forge national identity, a sense of belonging and unity, and by extension an "imagined community" as pointed out by Benedict Anderson in his famous 1983 book.

These, of course, are but a few possible scenarios where interpreting might effectively serve as a vital shaping and contributing force from various civilizational, historical, intercultural, communicative, socio-political, developmental, public health, and discursive dimensions and perspectives. These future research areas/topics will surely help bring IS research alive and make the impact of IS truly felt through such dynamic and mutually beneficial dialogues with other areas, fields, and disciplines.

6. Conclusion

As interpreting studies develops and becomes more mature as a (sub)discipline, it is crucially important for us to go from "within" to "beyond" and to go out of the traditional foci/comfort zones. This means that we need to look at how the interpreting process, practice and product

interact with and contribute to other facets and elements of our society and human civilization. However, it is worth clarifying that it is never the intention of the article to say that other studies looking at interpreting from "within" are not worthy lines of research and should be suspended altogether. As a matter of fact, as recognized earlier, these earlier studies looking at different aspects of interpreting have contributed significantly to IS during the (sub)discipline's development, and studies looking at different (internal) aspects of interpreting may well be alive and well and continue into the future.

This article might only be a humble call that it is about time that IS started to take a more confident outward-looking view in order to move it forward. We believe that it is only when interpreting studies research goes out of its traditional disciplinary comfort zone and looks beyond the deep-rooted and long-standing preoccupations with elements from "within" that the real impact of interpreting can be truly felt. In so doing, rather than purely a self-interested and self-obsessed importer of theories and approaches from elsewhere, interpreting studies can start to contribute to other aspects of our increasingly complex society and even our human civilization in a meaningful and sustained way.

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