Check for updates

INTERPRETING AND SOCIETY
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

Introduction: Special section on interpreting as a social practice

Interpreting and Society:
An Interdisciplinary Journal
March 2023, Vol. 3(1) 3–5
© The Author(s) 2023
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/27523810231166826
journals.sagepub.com/home/isy
SAGE

Binhua Wang
University of Leeds, UK

Wen Ren
Beijing Foreign Studies University, China

Chuan Yu
Hong Kong Baptist University, China

Interpreting is not only a complex cross-lingual information processing activity that requires complex cognitive efforts, but also a complex interpersonal and intercultural communicative social practice. While existing studies have devoted much attention to the cognitive aspect of interpreting practice, there is still the need for more systematic research that investigates the interpersonal, communicative and socio-cultural facets of interpreting, especially given the urgent needs to revisit the (human) nature of interpreting highlighted by the recent development of "smart machines".

With the Special Section on "interpreting as a social practice", we intend to assemble both critical conceptual research and innovative data/evidence-based analysis that highlight interpreting as a social practice. The Call for Paper issued in 2022 has attracted quite a few submissions. In order to ensure timely publication of the articles submitted to this themed section and to introduce the latest findings of interpreting as a social practice, we decided to publish the articles that have successfully gone through the peer reviews continuously in Volume 3 Issue 1 and Volume 3 Issue 2 of *Interpreting and Society: An Interdisciplinary Journal*.

In this issue, the Special Section features two articles. One is Binhua Wang's article titled "Evolution of interpreting as a social practice in China during the past four decades. An analysis of Chinese discourse on interpreting through the lens of social practice theory". In this article, Wang examines how interpreting has evolved as a social practice

Creative Commons Non Commercial CC BY-NC: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) which permits non-commercial use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage).

in China and how it has been shaped by the changing social environment during the past four decades. Viewing interpreting as a social practice, his study employs an adapted three-element model from the social practice theory as the analytic framework. Through a qualitative thematic and content analysis of about 50 relevant articles representing the three sets of elements, which are selected as from a database of Chinese articles on interpreting published in quality CSSCI/CORE journals in the past four decades, the "competences", "meanings" and "materials" of the social practice of interpreting are identified and their evolution in different periods are analysed. Through an examination of the economic, socio-political and technological developments in China during the past four decades, the evolution of interpreting in three periods (late 1970s to early 1990s, the mid-1990s to early 2000s, and 2007 to present) are identified, and the role of the changing environment in shaping the social practice of interpreting is revealed.

The other is Hilde Haualand's article, titled "License to inform: Norwegian sign language interpreters in a bureaucratic organisation", which examines the social status of sign language interpreters in Norway. Haualand's investigation reveals that there is a discrepancy in their social status and a struggle in defining their profession: On one hand, they are defined professionally by their impartiality on behalf of all participants in an interpreted event; on the other hand, they work for a service organisation that ultimately defines sign language interpreting services as a measure to "enhance functioning" for deaf and hard of hearing people. Through analysis of the interviews with sign language interpreters on their perceptions about potential scope of action as interpreters, the article suggests that it is necessary to have a conscious and continuous discussion among all participants of the social practice about the tension, which the sign language interpreters are caught in, between being defined as impartial professional language workers and as only functional "helpers" when working for an organisation with a mandate to assist deaf or hard of hearing people.

We welcome more submissions in this area. With this as a symbolic start, we also hope to attract original contributions to and proposals on themed sections and issues from various interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspectives, such as cognitive, technological, historical, and philosophical. Against the background of the latest developments in the interpreting profession and technology, we call for meaningful explorations and discussions about the following topics:

What roles do interpreting and interpreters play in the society in present times?

What roles did interpreting and interpreters play in historical events?

How does interpreting depend on and shape the various communicative situations?

How are cognitive processing and information processing in interpreting situated in socio-cultural contexts?

How is interpreting shaped by various institutional and political contexts? How does it contribute to them?

How does the recent technological development transform the interpreting practice and profession?

How can interpreters and their training adapt to the recent technological development?

What ethical issues need to be considered in machine interpreting?

Biography

Binhua Wang is Chair/Professor of interpreting and translation studies at University of Leeds in the UK. He serves as co-editor of *Interpreting and Society: An Interdisciplinary Journal*.

Wen Ren is Dean and Professor of interpreting and translation studies at Beijing Foreign Studies University in China. She serves as co-editor of *Interpreting and Society: An Interdisciplinary Journal*.

Chuan Yu is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Translation, Interpreting and Intercultural Studies at Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong SAR, China. She serves as associate editor of *Interpreting and Society: An Interdisciplinary Journal*.