

## **The making and moulding of interpreting quality through social roles and norms.**

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The issue of quality in interpreting has been debated for almost three decades now. Quality research in interpreting studies started with the seminal survey study conducted by Bühler (1986) among the members of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC). Since that time quality research has developed into a very prominent and strong research strand generating many conceptual/theoretical as well as empirical studies.

This paper reports some selected findings of two large-scale web-based surveys on the interrelatedness on the two aspects of quality and role conducted among the members of AIIC as well as the German association of conference interpreters (VKD). The two surveys feature responses from a total of 811 professional interpreters worldwide (Zwischenberger 2013).

The paper will also provide a new theoretical framework for the study of quality. It conceptualizes quality as a social construction and presents various approaches to quality in the history of conference interpreting research as social constructs. Thus, quality is not described as a quality which is ontologically inherent to a performance or its resulting product but a culture-, context- and time-bound phenomenon. As such, quality is highly variable which accounts for the oftentimes highly differing definitions of and approaches to quality encountered in the history of quality research. This new approach to quality is a proof of a sociological turn in quality research currently taking place in interpreting studies (Zwischenberger & Behr 2015).

Quality is related to the social roles of conference interpreters by norms. While the latter concept is rather well investigated in interpreting research and Translation studies in general, the former one has been heavily employed as a key concept in interpreting research without being well-defined. The concept of social role is usually taken for granted and appropriated in research on interpreting without acknowledging its epistemological basis in sociology and social anthropology. This paper will define the concept of social role thereby placing the theoretical framework for the study on quality presented here on a solid ground. This framework also integrates and describes social norms as mediating constructs on which the interrelatedness of quality and roles is based.

The two survey results suggest a large degree of homogeneity among the surveyed members of both AIIC and VKD. Both clearly favoured the relative importance of content-related criteria over form- and delivery related parameters. The criterion of sense consistency with the original was rated by far the most highly by both groups, while form- and delivery related criteria such as appropriate style or pleasant voice were rated far more lowly. The exception lies in the delivery-related parameter fluency of delivery which was rated very highly as well. The results are also confirmed by an integrated web-experiment. While hardly any statistically significant differences could be found between the two groups, there were quite a few statistically significant results which were related to the sociodemographic and –professional background of the interpreters.

After discussing this rather traditional part on quality, the issue is investigated from a more evident role-centered perspective, focusing on role-related issues in terms of the way interpreters define their own role and how important they perceive their work to be for successful communication etc. The core of this part is formed by the four role-related constructs “loyalty towards the speaker/original”, “detachment of the interpreter”, “reaction to working conditions” and “intervention into the original”. These constructs were extracted via a statistical factor analysis from a total of 14 items. Again, a high degree of consensus could be found between the two groups with the rating of the four constructs and the underlying items.

The conclusion of the study points to one direction: the interpreter’s role and thus quality can be defined over one single metaphoric construct which may be regarded as a supernorm that

governs the entire field of conference interpreting practice (Zwischenberger 2015). This supernorm, however, should be challenged as it does not only feature advantages but also considerable drawbacks for the profession.

#### References

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