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Accuracy is the underlying principle of interpreting.

Explore the different meanings of accuracy according to different authors and according to different settings and modes.

According to The Macquarie Dictionary (1990:6) the lemma *accurate* conveys the meaning of “in exact conformity to truth, to a standard of rule or to a model; free from error or defect”.

Among the ethics of the Translating/Interpreting profession, accuracy together with confidentiality and impartiality are the three fundamental principles on which any practitioner must base his/her own work.

In order to consider the impact of accuracy in the interpreting profession, definitions of accuracy, as they appear in different associations' code of ethics, will be summarized and compared starting with the AUSIT Code of Ethics for Interpreters & Translators (1996) developed in consultation with NAATI – the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters.

In the General Principles page, accuracy is defined as “Interpreters and translators shall take all the reasonable care to be accurate”. This concept is expanded further on (p.6) in four paragraphs with the titles of Truth and Completeness, Uncertainties in Transmission and Comprehension, Clear Transmission and Certification.

Specifically addressing interpreters, the first paragraph - Truth and Completeness - states that it is the interpreter's responsibility to make sure that all parties involved in a communication act have the same access to what is being said. Thus the interpreter shall convey accurately and completely everything is said. Interpreters must deliver the entire message including derogatory or vulgar remarks as well as non-verbal clues without making any omissions or

additions to the utterance and at all times encouraging the speakers to address each other directly.

In the ANITI (National Italian Association of Translators and Interpreters) Code of Rules for practising professionals under Comma 6 – Duty of Loyalty and Accuracy - it is stated that translators and interpreters shall carry on their professional assignment with loyalty and accuracy. The interpreter shall convey the message with objectiveness and impartiality, whereas the court interpreter shall in any case keep in mind that s/he is performing on the superior interest of Justice.

According to the Translator's Charter - prepared by FIT (International Federation of Translators) approved by the Congress of Dubrovnik in 1963 and amended in Oslo on July 19, 1994 – under Section 1.4 - General Obligations of the Translator - it is stated that every translation shall be faithful and render exactly the idea and form of the original text. This fidelity constitutes both a moral and legal obligation for the translator.

By comparing the three definitions it appears that correctness in conveying the message from one source to the other is the overarching principle for accuracy. Some authors though regard the notion of accuracy in interpreting as a not well defined point yet.

According to Hale (Module 4:69 – Accuracy and Equivalence) what may be accurate to some may not be so when certain principles are applied. Hale continues by stating that to untrained bilinguals accuracy of interpretation means merely reporting, often in third person, what has been said by a third party. That is giving a summary of what the discourse was and consequently filtering the message, adding what it seems relevant or omitting what has not been retained. This is by no means what accuracy of interpretation is meant for, even though,

Hale admits, research on the practices of court interpreters has demonstrated that they often act in line with the bilingual's delivery definition.

In my opinion it is fundamental at this point to identify the difference between a mere interpretation of an utterance and its accurate rendering into the target language. This in fact presumes the ability of the interpreter to refer the discourse with respect for its pragmatic aspects together with its semantic and morphologic sides. As for a translated text, an accurately rendered text is that which is read by the native speaker of the language without noticing that it is a translated text, so for an interpreted utterance the discourse must be conveyed in a way that the listener should not notice any dissonances or distortions which would render the utterance itself unnatural.

According to Ginori-Scimone (1995: 61-64) accuracy, apart from being a technical requirement, it is also a moral one. It is an obligation on the intrpreter's side to give the parties a total, unbiased, correct version of what is said in turn by the speakers. The authors suggest two definition of accuracy wich are strongly linked together: an interpretation should be technically accurate or faithful and morally accurate or truthful.

To deliver a technically accurate or faithful interpretation, the interpreter must follow the three stages of the process - namely understanding the message, converting the message into the TL, delivering the message to the listener/s.

To also deliver a morally accurate interpretation, the interpreter must not only be able to understand and deliver the final product, but in between stage one and three of the process s/he must be competent in truthfully making a faithful conversion of the text from SL into TL.

In *Liaison Interpreting* (Gentile, Ozolins, Vasilakakos 1995: 49) the authors define the position of the interpreter as that of communication facilitator. In order to facilitate communication the interpreter must possess not only language skills, that is the ability to use both languages correctly, but also interpreting skills that is the ability to correctly transfer meaning from the SL to the TL. Accuracy of interpretation presumes the interpreter's ability to exactly transfer the same amount of information as stated by each interlocutor. An accurate interpretation shall include correct choice of idiomatic usage of language, that is the ability to use the appropriate forms of the language - in terms of lexis, syntax, grammar etc.- together with its collocations. Forms and collocations may vary dramatically from one language to the other, the skill of the interpreter lies in his/her ability to use them appropriately. In order to achieve that, cultural expertise is of paramount importance for the interpreter.

To conclude with the concept of accuracy, the authors state that completeness in interpretation of a message is achieved by harmonically wrapping together speaking skills, appropriate use of register and accuracy in all its aspects – technical and pragmatic.

Baker (1992: 223) brings up the concept of “implicature” that in my opinion well fits the field of accuracy of interpretation. The author states that it is one of the most important notions recently emerged in text studies and that explains how the listeners come to understand more than the mere utterance or oral text actually said. Referring this concept to the interpreting field, an accurate rendering of an utterance should take into account pragmatic equivalence of the text with all its underlying meanings.

According to some research by Mason (5/2, 1999:147-160), standards of professional conduct in the USA state that interpreters should be as close to verbatim and literal in content and meaning as possible. Though courtroom interpreters' practice has proved that the translating

machine's mode is not always functional as it lacks the pragmatic approach to the language. Thus where the interpretation might sound verbatim correct to a SL listener, it is not accurate in its pragmatic context as far as TL is concerned.

Whereas it appears that the concept of accuracy in interpretation is shared in approximately the same way by different authors in its general meaning, it seems to vary according to different interpreting modes.

Ginori, Scimone (1995: 37-38) have devised a numerical value table indicating that, in various interpreting modes and according to them, time of conveyance and accuracy of performance affect and influence each other. The two authors affirm that, let aside translation jobs where time of performance has little importance, in the field of interpreting their table shows that the time factor becomes more and more important, as different modes are studied, affecting accuracy in a scaling way.

Consecutive interpreting appears at the top of the scale on their table, with little value given to time consideration and greater value to accuracy of performance. In such situation the interpreter can operate the conversion from SL to TL at the moment notes are taken thus having the opportunity to revise or rephrase ones own choices upon delivery.

In dialogue interpreting time is given a greater consideration with some high accuracy level yet achieved. Within this mode the interpreter has one only opportunity to analyze the discourse that is at the very moment the utterance is given and must deliver it at a reasonable speed. Consequently dialogue interpreting stands in the middle of their scale with equal values for time and accuracy.

In sight translation and simultaneous interpreting time is given a very high value, rating the highest of all modes. In such scenarios the interpreter is expected to deliver without interruptions and whereas in sight translation s/he is given the occasional opportunity to

correct him/herself and go back over the written text, in simultaneous interpreting any little hesitation and/or interruption would made the interpreter loose the thread of the discourse with foreseeable imbarassing consequences. In such case accuracy in terms of grammar and syntax is given less consideration against smooth delivery of the entire discourse.

With respect to that concept, Shlesinger (*The Translator* 1/2 1995: 193-214) reports a study conducted on some student interpreters performing in simultaneous mode and showing how often shifts in cohesion occur when the focus is necessarily on speed rather than on form.

According to Shlesinger, any text is kept together by a fine network of relations that make the text itself coherent and thus comprehensible. Through her research it appears that in simultaneous interpreting the process of recognising those cohesive links is hindered by various constraints that are intrinsic in the delivery mode itself. They include speed of delivery - out of the interpreter's control, linearity – the text becomes available gradually, and all that background information that is taken for granted by the speaker and his/her listeners but is not necessarily under the interpreter's direct control.

Among the author's conclusions one seems to me particularly consistent with accuracy of performance and that is failure to obtain the pragmatic function of a cohesive link even though a semantically correct interpretation is produced, as this may result in failure to reproduce functional equivalence of the discourse. In fact without elaborating on the lexical connections of a given sentence, the interpreter might incur into the risk of depriving the listener of important information needed for the understanding of the speaker's underlying intent.

In his investigation in dialogue interpreting, Mason (1999, 5:2, 147-160) explores the concept of pragmatic accuracy in cross-cultural interaction where interpreters, even though well trained, are influenced in their interpreting behaviour by situational constraints. Such

constraints be them role conflict, in-group loyalties, stress in sensitive situations, perception of power and distance, cannot but affect accuracy of delivery as generally conceived.

According to Gentile and alias (1996: 49) “In the first instance accuracy consists of not leaving parts of the meaning of an utterance out and of not adding anything to that meaning”. They continue by stating that the interpreter must in no case act as a censor. In fact the parties to a communication act must take full responsibility for what is said and take up all consequences for communication breakdown. And that is particularly important in political and legal scenarios where interlocutors do not accept such responsibility and blame the interpreter for lack of accuracy.

Again the concept of accuracy appears to acquire different shades of meaning according to different settings in the interpreting area.

In mental health settings, just to start with, the most important issue for the interpreter to consider consists in its peculiar nature as communicative interaction. The psychiatrist in fact needs to have a full picture of the patient’s response and this will include verbal and non-verbal clues, nonsense talk, tone of voice and particular vocal indicators of demeanour most of which might not be picked by the psychiatrist through purely auditory cues. In such circumstance accuracy of interpretation implies exact rendition of both content and vocal effects.

Legal settings are generally concerned with assisting with legal interviews with lawyers and police interviews. The requirement for accuracy is of paramount importance in such scenarios as a wrong interpretation may lead to the person being detained by the police or being unduly charged. Ginori, Scimone (1995: 82) infer that in such scenarios the interpreter might also be

required to clarify cultural peculiarities which might lead to the justification of some particular behaviour.

As for court interpreting is concerned, Hale (Module 1:22-24) states that an high level of accuracy is required not only in terms of contents but also of style of speech as “witnesses are assessed non only on what they say, but also on how they say it”.

In her study “The Treatment of Register Variation in Court Interpreting” (The Translator, 3:1,1997,39-54) Hale reports that in the adversarial legal system the speech patterns of a witness can determine the outcome of the case. Research and studies have shown that different feature in the witness speech – such as politeness, register, style, pronunciation, choice of lexis, grammar and syntax – will contribute in giving a certain image of the person, be that defendant or witness. The author has also conducted a study on the overarching tendency of Spanish speaking court interpreters to omit discourse markers in their renderings, particularly focusing on three of them, namely “now”, “well” and “see” and their different occurrence in cross-examination and examination in chief. According to her study discourse markers are often omitted for two main reasons – they are either considered redundant or difficult to render in the TL, whereas they are in fact extremely important devices that facilitate discourse coherence. Accuracy in rendering them with their pragmatic meaning would give justice to the illocutionary force of the person’s utterance.

In business settings (Gentile et al. 1996:116-124) the interpreter is presented with many different challenges not only in terms of language and accuracy, but also in terms of his/her differentiated roles. And whereas accuracy in rendering non-verbal meanings is absolutely fundamental in other settings, in business interpreting there are circumstances in which negotiations might come to a deadlock because of the variagated dynamics of the

communication, this is the case when the interpreter rather than rendering straightforwardly stress, rudeness or anger will subdue them for the sake of the negotiation.

To conclude I wish to report one last issue. In occasion of the last AUSIT Annual Conference “Strength in Diversity” hosted in Perth, Western Australia last 25-26 October 2002, during one of the concurring workshops it was discussed among AUSIT practitioners whether it would be suitable to better explain the definition of accuracy on the AUSIT Code of Ethics.

Particularly interesting was the intervention of our two Kimberley Aboriginal Interpreters discussing the inference of accurate rendering in Aboriginal settings. Pragmatic accuracy versus formal accuracy appeared to be favourable together with pragmatically correct rednering of colloquialisms and idiomatic forms.

It was then concluded that whereas accuracy is and stays one of the three fundamental principles of interpretation, its application varies according to different situations and it is the interpreter that needs to be able to recognise its different applications.

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