Chapter 1

Introduction

From the very beginning of my interpreting career I have undertaken assignments in the workplace domain, in what is commonly referred to in the UK as "Access to Work" interpreting. I have worked alongside deaf and hearing employees, interpreting a wide variety of workplace-related interaction, such as team meetings and one-to-one supervision sessions. The origins of my interest in workplace interpreting can be traced to a short exchange between two employees one Monday morning. A simple inquiry from one member of staff to another—"how was your weekend?"—seemed on the surface to be the type of small talk exchange that regularly occurs across a variety of workplaces, from factory floors to offices and major institutions. However, in this instance the exchange was between a deaf employee and a hearing employee, and I was the interpreter. As the deaf employee described in some detail the activities she had engaged in that particular weekend, I noted her hearing colleague's discomfort with the length of the reply. This was evidenced by attempts to end the conversation (e.g., shortening of replies, minimal feedback signals, displaying exclusionary body language, and focusing attention on the computer).

Ultimately the deaf employee addressed me directly, remarking on what she perceived as her coworker's rude behavior. I felt highly uncomfortable and was aware of an urge to "explain" my understanding of what constituted acceptable Monday morning "small talk." My subsequent reflection on this short interaction led me to consider the complexities of workplace discourse and the norms, both implicit and explicit, which underpin employee behavior in this domain.

My curiosity and interest in workplace interpreting focused on three main issues. Firstly, as previously described, I frequently found myself interpreting the less formal conversations that occur in the workplace, those exchanges we generally refer to as "office chitchat or gossip." These informal, less work-focused conversations can act as a passport

to workplace relationships. I wanted to explore the extent to which deaf employees were able to relate to and engage with their hearing peers and examine the interpreter's impact on the collegial relationship. Secondly, team meetings had always seemed particularly difficult to manage, especially when the deaf employee (as in the majority of cases) was the sole deaf participant. Given my struggle in trying to understand and interpret many people talking over each other, what sort of access was the deaf person getting? What was the quality and clarity of the interpretation like for them? Could they get the full picture of how the team members were interacting with each other? Finally, the way in which deaf and hearing employees referred to me, and to my role, made me reflect on how the interpreter's role is understood within this setting. A desire to explore the issues underlying these three specific areas of workplace interpreting eventually led to the research outlined in this volume.

This volume is therefore a "data-rich" (Mason, 2000, p. 220), and "thick" (Sarangi & Roberts, 1999, pp. 1–2) description of the interpreting process. In creating this description I have drawn on interpreters' experiences of workplace interpreting, together with transcripts from a number of video-recordings of interpreted workplace events, and video playback interviews with the main participants from a specific research site.

DEAF PEOPLE AND INTERPRETERS IN THE WORKPLACE

The nature of work has changed dramatically over the last forty years, affecting the way in which many people engage in employment. Deindustrialization, changes in technology, and a move towards employment in the service industries have all meant a growth in white-collar jobs and a decline in blue-collar manual ones (Strangleman & Warren, 2008). These changes have been reflected in the type of work open to deaf people, with a move away from traditional manual trades to an increased take up of white-collar or office-based employment. Interpreters are therefore increasingly being employed in a domain that differs considerably to community or conference interpreting.

The Sayce report (2011) shows 37,300 disabled people in the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) Access to Work program for the period 2009–2010. Under the DWP category "difficulty in hearing," approximately 5,000 deaf and hard of hearing people received Access

to Work support in the year 2013 (BDA, 2013). Many are profoundly deaf, but all are likely to have some degree of hearing loss that results in communication difficulties. The Access to Work scheme (AtW), a government initiative introduced in 1994, provides support for employers and disabled employees, enabling disabled individuals to undertake work (Thornton, 2003). This support includes the provision of interpreters and forms the majority of deaf people's support under this scheme. AtW assesses the deaf employee's communication needs in order to establish and allocate a number of support hours.

In the UK, interpreters are generally employed to work with deaf people who use British Sign Language (BSL) as their first or preferred language, in what are mainly hearing-dominated workplace environments. Contracted on both a staff and freelance basis, interpreters can work in a wide variety of settings, ranging from offices, social services, and education, to the factory floor. They interpret across a wide spectrum of interactions, including team meetings, formal and informal discussions, training events, supervisions, conferences and everyday social workplace interaction. The frequency of their work in this environment varies greatly, dependent upon the deaf employee's requirements and their allocated AtW budget. Interpreters can therefore be booked to interpret for a two-hour meeting once a month or may find themselves working with the same deaf client, seven hours per day, five days a week, over a number of years. If assigned to the deaf employee across the normal pattern of a working day, the interpreter will usually be located in the same room as the deaf employee and will be expected to interpret as and when required.

In the workplace, an interpreter can provide access to communication, which contributes to the deaf employee's ability to undertake their job role on an equal basis with their hearing peers. However, interpreters are not only working between different languages, translating between English and BSL, they are also negotiating a wealth of cultural differences. These differences relate to deaf and hearing culture, as well as disparate perceptions of workplace norms and practices. Organizations and institutions create complex environments with intricate power structures and hierarchies (Sarangi & Roberts, 1999). The workplace has its own culture, formed in part through the social interaction of its employees, with patterns and rules developing from those relationships. Employees relate to each other in a variety of ways and on differing levels of formality. The issue of power is prevalent throughout all interaction, with participants

continually negotiating and renegotiating their roles (Holmes, 2000b). All of these elements place constraints upon the workplace interpreter's role and interpreting performance.

When we consider the norms and established practices pertaining to the workplace, we can see that deaf people generally find themselves in the "monolingual, speaking and listening world of hearing English users" (Foster, 1998, p. 125). It is an environment where the social, cultural, and linguistic conventions of hearing people are deeply embedded and are accepted as the norm (Turner et al., 2002). This volume will therefore examine the norms underpinning hearing-dominated workplaces, specifically those relating to a community of practice (CofP). The main focus will be the interpretation of small talk and humorous exchanges in multiparty interaction. These can be crucial elements of workplace talk that allow employees to establish, negotiate, and maintain relationships, thus reinforcing collegiality.

Some Key Concepts

The Deaf/Deaf Debate

Throughout this volume I use the term "deaf" to refer to the whole range of individuals with a degree of hearing loss. While I am aware of and fully appreciate the convention of writing deaf with a capital D when referring to deaf people who use a signed language and who identify as part of a minority cultural group (Woodward, 1972), the use of lowercase "deaf" recognizes the way in which the deaf community has evolved due to recent medical advancements and changes to educational policy (Napier, 2009). The "deaf community," and membership thereof, is less clearly defined than in the past. Individuals are becoming members of the community "as late learners of sign language" (Napier, 2009, p. 4), and are thus likely to define themselves differently to long-standing members. Ultimately, it is likely that any individual with a significant hearing loss will experience considerable problems in the workplace, irrespective of their cultural identification. It is therefore not appropriate to assign the word "Deaf" to cover what is in reality a range of people with varying degrees of hearing loss, affiliated to different cultural backgrounds. Lowercase "deaf" is thus used for all references to deafness, deaf people and deaf community. However, the usage of the original uppercase "D" has been retained in quotations.

Active Third Participant

In this study, my focus is on the interpreter as an active third partici-pant in the communicative event (Metzger, 1999; Roy, 1989; Wadensjö, 1998). Research in the field of interpreting has shown that an interac-tive or participatory stance is essential in order to allow interpreters to engage effectively in dialogue or community interpreting. In the work-place, much of the conflict experienced by interpreters appears to stem directly from the clash between their conscious understanding of their role as an active and fully involved member of the interpreted interac-tion and their unconscious, yet often firmly held belief, that they are an invisible and uninvolved participant. The research therefore explores the tensions produced from this role conflict, taking into account the impact on all the participants in the interpreted event.

Community of Practice

In focusing on workplace team meetings, I have used the concept of community of practice. The concept of CofP can refer to groups of people who have a shared interest in a topic or problem and who collaborate over a period of time to address issues, share ideas, and solve prob-lems. CofPs can develop around the activities group members engage in together, along with their shared objectives and attitudes (Holmes, 2001). According to Wenger (1998, p. 73) there are three dimensions of "practice" that need to be fulfilled in order to make up a CofP, these being mutual engagement, a joint negotiated enterprise, and a shared repertoire. These components are clearly evident in business meetings, as participants "mutually engage with one another in a jointly negoti-ated enterprise, determined by the meeting's agenda" (Mullany, 2004, p. 22). Work groups often share particular goals and ways of interacting and "come together around mutual engagement in an endeavor" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992, p. 464). Importantly in terms of the cur-rent study, they have established "ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations" that have developed out of their mutual endeavor (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992, p. 464).

Overview of Chapters

In order to provide context for the research, Chapters 2, 3, and 4 outline a number of issues relevant to interpreting in workplace settings,

beginning with deaf people's experience of employment. Chapter 3 addresses the principal themes in institutional and workplace discourse. Chapter 4 reviews the descriptions and definitions of the role of interpreters. The implications of these role metaphors are discussed in relation to interpreters in workplace settings, directing the focus to the ways in which they manage collegial and collaborative talk such as small talk and humor. Chapter 5 describes the data collection process, beginning with the questionnaire responses and practitioner journals, and then detailing the collection of the video data. The chapter looks at the challenges of recruiting participants, obtaining access to the research sites, and the sensitive nature of conducting research with members of the deaf community and with interpreters. The difficulties posed by the videoing and transcription of multiparty, signed language interpreted interaction are also highlighted.

In section 2 of Chapter 5, the theoretical framework applied throughout the study is outlined. Interactional approaches to language and social life are reviewed, with a Linguistic Ethnographic framework being applied to the analysis of the transcripts of the video data. Approaches to analyzing turn-taking, overlapping talk, humor, and small talk are also considered.

Chapter 6 details the findings gathered from the questionnaire responses and practitioner journals, exploring the experiences of workplace interpreters. This provides the background to the issues examined in Chapter 7, wherein the video data is analyzed and discussed. The focus here is on the main aspects that emerged from the analysis of the video data, namely the ways in which instances of humor and small talk are interpreted and how interpreters manage the collaborative floor during team meetings. The final section describes the video playback interviews. Chapters 8 and 9 review the findings from the data and discusses these in detail, creating a comprehensive description of the interpreter's role in workplace discourse. The interpreter's impact on the interaction and relationship between deaf and hearing employees is highlighted, demonstrating their vital role within a workplace CofP. The implications of the research findings are discussed in relation to the theory of signed language interpreting. Finally, in Chapter 10, the volume is summarized, considering further some of the potential applications of the research.