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From Writing to Sign: An investigation of the impact of text modalities on translation

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Abstract: This article investigates the roles that text modalities play in a translation from written text into recorded signed language. While written literacy practices have a long history, practices involving recorded signed texts are only beginning to develop. In addition, the specific characteristics of source and target modes offer different potentials and limitations, causing challenges for translation between written and signed language. Drawing on an ideological model of literacy and a social-semiotic multimodality approach, this article presents findings of a qualitative case study analyzing one practitioner's strategies translating an academic text from written English into British Sign Language. Data generated through interviews and text analysis reveal an event influenced by the affordances of the media and the translator's consideration of source and target literacy practices.

Keywords: sign language translation, literacy practices, multimodality, affordance, New Literacy Studies, recorded sign language

Literacy practices and translation in Deaf communities

Embedded in wider Hearing societies, Deaf people live in highly literacy-focused environments.¹ Writing and reading are integral parts of Western culture and are central to many aspects of life, including educational, professional, recreational, public and other social contexts.² Even in an age during which the increasing prominence of the screen and digital media is changing the communication landscape -- which ostensibly diminishes the importance of print material -- written language is still pervasive. Not only did historical

¹ Some terminological clarifications are useful at this stage:

d/Deaf: I follow the conventions of capitalizing the term 'Deaf' to foreground cultural rather than audiological aspects relating to Deafness (e.g., Ladd 2003). In a similar vein, I follow the less common convention of referring to Hearing culture through capitalization (cf. Napier 2002). Distinguishing between practices that are culturally relevant and indigenous to Deaf communities and those that essentially emerged from the dominant surrounding Hearing communities is useful for this article to highlight the complex relationships between them. The fact that Deaf and Hearing practices cannot be conceived as binary, that the two are necessarily intertwined given the historical and social circumstances surrounding Deaf people, is at the center of this work (see Kusters, de Meulder, and O'Brien 2017 for a critical discussion).

Literacy: Following Heath's definition of literacy events, I will use the term 'literacy' to refer to practices and events "in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretative processes" (Heath 1982: 93).

² **West/Western:** Despite its flaws (see, for example, Susam-Sarajeva 2002 or Tymoczko 2007: 15–16 for discussion), I use the terms 'West' and 'Western' with particular reference to thought and practices that have developed within dominant centres of the world — often, though not exclusively in the 'West.'

cultural developments in the West afford literacy a high social, prestigious status, associated with intellectual capacity and the civilization of societies (as, for example, implied in Ong's (1982) description of literacy), writing also presents a useful practical tool that enabled communication across time and space before the development of audiovisual recording technologies. Deaf communities, geographically and socially attached to Hearing societies, are in close contact with such practices.

Deaf people are expected to participate in Hearing literacy practices in order to successfully contribute in an array of aspects of social life. However, as Thoutenhoofd (2001) argues, literacy also plays an important role in indigenous Deaf practices as Deaf people incorporate writing in their cultural activities (cf. Dodds and Fowler 2000). Deaf (written) literacy practices manifest themselves in material used for promotion of Deaf activities (e.g., newsletters of Deaf clubs or organizations), while subtitles, emails, text messaging, and the internet are of increased importance to a community which relies on visual communication in today's digital age (see Maxwell 1985, Albertini, and Shannon 1996, and Power and Power 2004 for discussions of written language use in Deaf communities).

In the absence of an established writing system for signed languages (see Woll, Sutton-Spence, and Elton 2001: 19–20 for discussion), Deaf people have borrowed, and sometimes adapted, the written language of the Hearing societies in which they are embedded. However, with written languages constituting a second language for many Deaf people, research suggests that Deaf people are underachieving in terms of literacy despite the educational focus on reading and writing (Marschark, Lang, and Albertini 2002). Literacy is more than just a skill; it is a practice that is deeply rooted in social, cultural and ideological developments and beliefs. As such, the context must be taken into account when considering literacy and discussions should not rely solely on the 'ability' whether Deaf people can, should, or want to use writing. As Turner (2007: 121) notes:

“For many Deaf people, English is not a language, [...] but a subject from school, and link with unpleasant experiences [...]. ‘English is not us, it is them, and they are oppressors.’ It is the language of bureaucracy and authority, and is always a reminder of Deaf people's status as outsiders.”

Although attitudes naturally vary and might change with an increasingly empowered younger generation of Deaf people, who comfortably move between Deaf and Hearing environments (Turner 2004), written literacy is associated with Hearing culture; there is an argument that

full empowerment can only be realized when texts are produced in Deaf people's "natural and preferred" (Brennan 1992: 10) language.

Communication across time and space using sign languages, i.e., the central and indigenous languages of Deaf communities, has only become possible in the past few decades. With technological advances enabling even laypeople to produce and receive audiovisual texts with widely available and accessible technology, the recording of visual-gestural languages has become widespread and at least partially replaces written communication. Text types and genres that were previously reserved for written language are now being created through (recorded) signed language, stimulating the extension of the linguistic repertoire of sign languages. Moreover, documenting, preserving and promoting signs (Burch 2004), "the camera becomes the printing press" (Krentz 2006) – a process which is likely to raise the status of sign languages and Deaf communities. Such developments have led some to argue that we can now talk about sign language 'literacy' (Czubek 2006). Although contested by others (see Czubek 2006 and Paul 2006 for discussion), not least because of the paradox evoked by the etymological origin of the term literacy referring to alphabetic writing only, Czubek picks up on the idea that literacy practices are culturally, ideologically constructed and that the modality in which they are realized is of lesser significance. He argues that signed recordings offer opportunities equal to those provided by writing. Additionally, conceiving Deaf communities as literate cultures sets them on a par with dominant cultures in which literacy plays a central role. Whether we adopt the notion of "sign language literacy" or not, the practice of recording signed languages corresponds to, partially replaces, and adds to written practices and can therefore, in some abstract sense, be regarded as part of literacy practices in Deaf communities. However, the notion of "sign language literacy" remains problematic. Borrowing terminology that is associated with written text may lead to the erroneous presumption that recorded signing follows the rules, conventions and practices associated with writing. While more discussion is surely necessary, in this article I will thus not use the term "sign language literacy," but, in want of a better label, I will pragmatically use the descriptive label "recorded signed language."

Able to communicate across time and space, recorded signed language seems to be perceived as a natural equivalent to writing. The emergence of translation practices between written and recorded signed texts, sparked by technological advances since the turn of the century, is a logical consequence (see Hodge et al. 2015 for an account of the number of online translations from English into Australian Sign Language; as examples of growing scholarly engagement with the topic, see Banna 2004; Leneham 2007; Stone 2007, 2009; Wurm 2014;

Murray 2017). Translation enables Deaf people, regardless of their literacy skills, to access and produce communication with Hearing people in an increased range of contexts independently in their “natural and preferred language” (Brennan 1992: 10). At the same time translations contribute to enlarging the body of recorded signed texts and can be expected to be a central player in shaping communicative practices associated with this growing activity. While there is reason to believe that it will gain in importance, the practice of translating written language into signed language is still in its infancy. Different from prototypical signed-spoken language interpreting as well as from prototypical translations between written texts (Wurm 2014), there are currently not many precedents translators can use to develop strategies, nor is there a large body of parallel recorded signed texts to draw on as yet. What influences translators’ decision-making processes when creating signed target texts? To what extent do translators replicate conventions that developed within written contexts, and to what extent do they echo indigenous sign language practices? In what way do particular properties of source text and target text modalities influence translation choices?

In this article, I aim to explore these questions by investigating the impact of the intermodal shift from writing to sign in a translation event, examining one case which involved the translation of one chapter of an academic textbook into digitally recorded British Sign Language (BSL). I ground my study in a New Literacy Studies framework and draw on an “ideological model of literacy” (Street 1984) as well as ideas developed within a social-semiotic approach to multimodality that accounts for the potentials and limitations invoked by the material properties of text modalities.

The literature I refer to particularly concentrates on Hearing contexts, predominantly focusing on monolingual, spoken and written language practices, largely ignoring signed language and translation practices. We could argue, like Stone (2006: 39), that “...unlike English, BSL is an unwritten language” and “[u]nwritten or ‘oral’ languages exhibit different features”; signing and orality are thus on a par in opposition to written language. Indeed we can expect the former two to have much in common as both are generally produced linearly (i.e., text elements are communicated sequentially in the same order as perceived by the communicants), their ‘natural’ forms are ephemeral and they constitute primary modalities (i.e., those that can be acquired rather than learned). They therefore tend to be used in similar situations and contexts. However, there are also essential differences in terms of structure, use and status between spoken and signed communication, due to historical and social developments and because of the particularities of the visual/gestural mode of signed

languages on the one hand and the aural/oral mode of spoken languages on the other.³ Simply and uncritically adopting the labels “orality” and “literacy” may blur over some of the stark and fine differences and fail to observe the particularities of signed language communication. While we should be cautious of transferring ideas uncritically to signed contexts, the proposed framework consciously moves away from a clear separation of modalities and pays particular attention to non-central and cross-cultural practices, inviting an application to translation events in which written and signed languages are at the center. Moreover, the focus of the following review is not so much on what is analyzed but on how, providing a methodological lens for this work.

Toward a social-semiotic multimodality approach

Systematic research investigating the relationship between different language modalities has only been part of linguistic study since the second half of the twentieth century. Following analysis of few samples of prototypical written and spoken texts, linguistic accounts particularly highlight the textual and syntactic differences between speech and writing (e.g., Halliday 1989). While the complexities of the relationships are highlighted by authors such as Gregory and Carroll (1978) and Tannen (1982), the starting points nevertheless remain to examine the differences between spoken and written modalities.

Approaching the topic of literacy by highlighting the potential effects of written language on cognition and cultural developments, scholars such as Goody and Watt (1968) and Ong (1982) equally stress the discrepancies between literacy and orality. Thought, when put on the page, they argue, is decontextualized from the human mind, making it abstract and objective. Literacy, so goes the argument, has the ability to encourage logical, abstract and objective thinking, and as such forms the basis for cognitive abilities of individuals and cultures, in other words civilization. The ideas result in an equation, critically put forward by Baynham (1995: 52), as “LITERACY = PROGRESS = DEVELOPMENT = ENLIGHTENMENT.” Replicating and re-enforcing a discourse that is built on central Western values, this model is problematic as it diminishes intellectual properties of communities that do not rely on literacy in the same ways, such as Deaf communities. Arguing against a “great divide” between literacy and orality, an “ideological model of literacy” doubts that literacy is an ‘autonomous’ entity with powers over people (Street 1984). Instead it emphasizes that people use literacy according to communicative practices

³ For an in-depth discussion of the differences and similarities between signed and spoken languages see the contributions in Meier, Cormier, and Quinto-Pozos (2002).

that are relevant to them and their communities, historical contexts and cultures. In other words, “rather than stress how literacy affects people, we want to take the opposite tack and examine how people affect literacy” (Kulick and Stroud 1993: 31). Literacy, “linked to cultural and power structures in society” (Street 1993: 7), is more than just a skill.

Acquisition and use of literacy as well as its characteristics are necessarily ideological and cannot be separated from the socio-cultural surroundings. The term ‘ideological’ is used deliberately in the name of this model to highlight this and to openly acknowledge that “all approaches to literacy in practice will involve some [] bias” (see Street 1993: 7–8 for discussion).

With roots in an anthropological, ethnographic tradition, the methodological principle within an ideological model of literacy is to connect the micro with the macro, the here and now with the wider social and cultural contexts. A large body of research performed under such an analytical framework, predominantly studying practices outside central Western domains, which has come to be known as the “New Literacy Studies” (Gee 1990), confirms that “[literacy] varies from one culture or sub-group to another” (Street 1993: 29) and according to the institutional and social environment (see, for example, the contributions to Street 1993 and Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanič 2000). We cannot conceive of literacy as a single, universal, unchangeable phenomenon that behaves in a fixed way according to predictable principles and that receives the same status in all situations; literacies are culturally, socially, politically and historically situated.

Societies and cultures are not stable but are shaped by constant change and developments; literacy practices are in flux, new practices develop, dominant practices lose their central status, vernacular practices gain visibility, whether through social developments, technological advances or changes in political and institutional policies (Street 1995; Lewis 1993). In an age that is shaped by advances in communication technologies, we are witnessing what Kress (2003: 1) describes as a: “broad move from the now centuries-long dominance of writing to the new dominance of the image and, on the other hand, the move from the dominance of the medium of the book to the dominance of the medium of the screen.” With emerging communication modes we adapt our communication practices to the particularities of the new media with effects on the linguistic components of writing, as well as the status of written language (Kress 2003: 21); “writing now plays one part in communicational ensembles, and no longer *the* part” (Kress 2003: 21, original emphasis), together with still and moving image, and recorded sound. This is true in vernacular as well

as dominant literacy-focused contexts, such as academia. With specific regard to this case study, it is now possible, and socially appropriate, to produce an academic text in signed language, recorded and distributed in a video format. Such developments raise questions regarding which modes and media lend themselves to be used in what contexts and for which purposes, questions which have led to an increase of multimodality studies.

By distancing itself too much from an autonomous model of literacy, and concentrating too much on the socio-cultural practices which undeniably surround literacy, it could be argued that the ideological model fails to provide a complete picture regarding the potentials and limitations of text modalities and media (see, for example, Brandt and Clinton 2002, and Stephens 2000 for discussion). Brandt and Clinton (2002) argue in favor of extending the model by recognizing literacy as an active agent in a literacy event that through its materiality and “(some)thing-ness” (Brandt and Clinton 2002: 344) contributes to literacy activities.

This is accounted for in a social-semiotic framework of multimodality (Kress 2003; 2010), which regards communication as governed by social forces as well as by the potentials and constraints offered by a specific mode, i.e., what is described as affordances (Kress 2010). In this regard, a specific mode might be better suited for certain purposes than others: “The *materiality* of mode, for instance the material of *sound* in *speech* and *music*, or of *graphic matter* and *light* in *image*, or the *motion of parts of the body* in *gesture*, holds specific potentials for representation, and at the same time brings certain limitations” (Kress 2003: 45, original emphasis).

Avoiding falling into a discourse that resembles an autonomous model of literacy and that assumes a causality imposed by the technology of writing, this approach recognizes that it is not technology alone that has an effect on communities but rather “[t]echnologies become significant when social and cultural conditions allow them to become significant” (Kress 2003: 18). Moreover, “[c]ultures work with these material affordances in ways which arise from and reflect their concerns, values and meanings” (ibid.: 45). Affordances and social powers are intrinsically interlinked and are both important factors in shaping literacy practices.

The case study

This research is part of a larger project (Wurm 2010, 2014) and adopts a qualitative, data-driven, multi-method case study approach to investigate an authentic event. The case is a translation event which was commissioned as part of a part-time program to train tutors of BSL teachers at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 2007. The student cohort,

all Deaf BSL users, had asked for key reading material to be translated into BSL, their preferred language and the language at the center of their course. A translator was commissioned to translate a total of eight key texts from English to BSL, one per module, over the course of the program. This article focuses on the fourth in this series.

The source text is the second chapter of Lightbown and Spada's (2006) textbook *Explaining Second Language Learning*. The 21-page-long source text uses academic, yet accessible language, containing typical elements of a literature review (such as references to the literature and a critical overview of different theories), as well as interactive and illustrative elements (such as a practical exercise and two cartoons). The target text is a DVD with 105 minutes of signed text.

The translator is a hearing qualified registered BSL-English interpreter with — at the time — unusually extensive experience in written-sign translations. English is her A-language and BSL her B-language. Over the course of the translation series for this program, she worked closely together with the program coordinator, a Deaf BSL user, who knew the target audience well and was familiar with the subject matter. Together they discussed translation issues (such as subject-specific terminology) and made decisions about editing (e.g., where to insert subtitles and intertitles).

The actual translation process in which the translator is actively involved spans nine days and includes a preparation as well as a production phase.⁴ The translator reported working with the source text in her own time and place for approximately three days during the course of a week. Reading, understanding, researching, chunking, and marking the source text, the translator considered different translation options and created an overall mental image of the target text. Another day of preparation was spent meeting the program coordinator to discuss specific translation issues and to prepare prompts in the form of flipcharts containing core information and a voice recording of the full text, which the translator used for the recording of the target text in the studio. The translator filmed the target text within two days, going through the text section by section, producing up to five takes for each sub-chapter. Post-editing and DVD production were then completed by the program coordinator, who added titles, subtitles, and other visual information before distributing the finalized DVD to the target audience.

⁴ For greater detail, see Wurm (2010; 2014).

In line with the theoretical foundations presented above, this research goes beyond a textual analysis to analyze this translation event to emphasize the translator's account of her decision-making processes. Data were generated through observation of part of the translation process; three interviews with the translator conducted at different stages of the translation process, one of which included a retrospective think-aloud protocol; an investigation of the final and unedited versions of the target text; and the collection of other preparatory documents developed by the translator. The different data sources were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo following general principles of grounded theory by means of theoretical sampling, coding, theoretical saturation, and constant comparison (Bryman 2004: 391). The data analysis focuses on themes that emerged from investigation of the interviews and the unedited and final target text versions.

Some initial considerations

Describing the translation event as an “exciting” and “interesting” (I1: 1085) opportunity, the translator perceives the text as belonging to a “new genre” in signed language (I1: 1069–70) and highlights the lack of parallel texts repeatedly when describing the specificities of the translation event. In the absence of texts that are “recorded on DVD, [...] academic, [...] produced in a similar kind of process” (I1: 1067), which she would regard as useful templates, she draws on her experiences with other BSL genres and registers:

...at the moment, [...] I'm bringing in the experience of television, [...] and also, in terms of the kind of content and, [...] the register and the delivery of the kind of content, I'm probably falling back on academic lectures, or presentations that I've seen Deaf people give at conferences. [...] That would have been nice to have a whole bank of that kind of [recorded] material where you can look through it and go ‘Ooh, yes, I'm gonna do it in that way.’ But there hasn't. (I1: 1074–81)

When reflecting on her target text solutions, the translator repeatedly refers to the overall aims of the translation which are based on her own reflections and discussions with the program coordinator. In the absence of parallel texts, the identified overall aim of the translation seems the main guiding principle for developing target text solutions:

these texts are to be used by students on the course as [...] core texts basically for studying, which presents some very interesting questions when you're then trying to

put these into sign language because you have to begin to think about how they're gonna be used, [...] how the end-users are gonna interact with the text. (I1: 460–3)

The translator reports that the target text was supposed to act as a bridge to the source text as well as other written English academic texts, while at the same time, “hopefully it will stand as a text by itself” (I1: 605). The translator specifies: “...we don't know [whether the students will use the signed text independently in conjunction with the English text]. [...] what we wanted to do is giving them an opportunity to do both. Either or, or both” (I1: 598–9). As the following analysis of target text features will show, this overarching aim influences many decisions.

Importing source text features

When reflecting on how people interact with written text in academic contexts, the translator states:

When I look through text in English, if I'm studying from it, what I want to be able to do is go backwards and forwards to different [...] parts of the page. I want to be able to write all over it and put highlighter all over it and I want to be able to know clearly where bits are, so that I don't have to read through the whole thing to get to that bit that I really want to quote from, and I want the quotes to be really clear... (I1: 465–9)

The translator highlights the affordances provided by print media. Being static and thus easily scannable, writing allows the reader to navigate through a text easily. In addition, one is able to engage with it physically by writing on it. Rooted in a long history of literacy practices, we use writing, particularly in academic contexts, in order to engage with the content and critically respond to it. The translator reflects:

If you think about a written English text, we're introduced to them at very, very young ages, [...] to all kinds of written text. By the time you get to the stage where you're consuming academic texts, your familiarity with what to do with text is such that... it's not a barrier to you at all. You just interact with it in your own head as it were. I think that Deaf people have not had access to BSL texts in that way and in such a range for over [...] a number of years. And so I kind of think that their expectations of what you might find in a text [are different]. (I1: 1731–6)

Engagement with a text may happen implicitly in our heads, or, as in educational contexts, in a formulated response in the form of, for example, coursework. Western conventions of academic writing suggest that direct reference is made to written material. Aiming for the students to participate in such practices, the translator considers the limitations imposed by a filmed signed modality in comparison with writing, but together with the program coordinator develops solutions to circumvent these: “We’re trying to make something that at the end of the day is not just a solid, almost linear piece of signing from start on. We want something that they can interact with” (I1: 553–4). The target text borrows written language to present chapter headlines in the form of intertitles. Interspersed subtitles provide access to instances of relevant subject-specific terminology, references to the literature, quotes and specific examples. Moreover, visual cartoons presented in the source text are scanned and inserted at the relevant target text passages. The translator explains:

... an academic text [...] is very, very dense. There is quite a lot of jargon and specific terminology. And we felt that [...] it’s just gonna look too heavy as a text to absorb visually. And also that a lot of these words are gonna look unfamiliar. Again, [...] the purpose of this is to afford access to students to further study if they want to look something up. If they want to chase a reference or something, they need to know very clearly how that’s spelled, [...] probably slightly more clearly than my fingerspelling will open it. (I1: 556–61)

While the signed modality only carries limitations in this regard, the result is a multimodal text, amalgamating directly borrowed features from the source text and a signed text which can stand by itself.

This solution points to the translator’s and program coordinator’s consideration of the social surroundings, that is, that signing does not as yet have the same status of relevance as written language in this particular domain. Deaf people are still required to participate in Hearing practices, including the use of written language in order to access and produce academic texts. Likewise, the translator and program coordinator draw on the affordances of writing, which provide more immediate and reliable access to references to names and subject-specific terminology than recorded signing. In addition to the possibilities provided by the inherent properties of writing, the multimodal synthesis of filmed signed text and added subtitles affords navigation through the text; while scanning the target text, the written

intertitles and subtitles provide quick and easy reference points, enabling students to identify a particular section in the text more easily and allowing them to scan the text. While, as the translator comments, “we’re not there yet; we’re not at the point where students can highlight all over their BSL text” (I1: 479), this element shows a creative solution derived from a combination of understanding the social relevance of particular communication practices and maximizing the potentials provided by the modalities and media involved.

Drawing on target cultural practices

In addition to incorporating features in the target text that explicitly aim to reflect elements at home in source language and cultural practices, the target text involves aspects that do not find their origin in the source context.

Writing, particularly enabled by modern word-processing facilities, enables effortless editing, which ensured eradication of orthographic and grammatical errors in the source text in line with common academic presentational standards. This is different in the target text, demonstrated through the example of fingerspelling errors:

Target Text: Title 5 Take 3 (final version):

THIS b-e-n... b-e-h-a-v-i-o-u-r-i-s-m THEORY ref. THIS LINKED WHAT c-o-n-t-r-a-s-t-i-v-e a-n-a-l-y-s-i-s THEORY.

[Back translation: This ben..., behaviourism theory was linked to contrastive analysis theory.]

While in other sections the misspelling of a word leads the translator to produce another, revised version of the paragraph she is working on, in this example, the translator accepts the ‘slip of the hand,’ repairing it within the text, which remains visible in the final target text version.

We here have to distinguish between translational issues and what has been referred to as “performance errors” (e.g., Stone 2006: 56–7). Since signed texts are created ad hoc, Stone (2006: 84) argues that, no matter how prepared, text producers necessarily face a performance element. When producing signed texts, people may stumble over their utterances or incorporate false starts or hesitations. While the option to retake a session exists, editability of signed recordings is limited when compared with the printed nature of the source text due to the inherent properties of the different modalities.

While the existence of fingerspelling errors could superficially be regarded as a flaw in a recorded text, there is evidence that the translator deliberately includes features that may initially be perceived as ‘weaknesses’ associated with spontaneously produced language. Repeatedly, the translator uses what may be called pretend-hesitations: gestures suggesting hesitation, e.g., open hands, palms facing up, at points with wriggling fingers, eyegaze away from the camera; or slowly extended signs, sometimes with a circular movement, in the middle of a signed utterance. The translator seems to be looking for the correct sign. Comparison of the different target text versions, however, reveals that these are replicated throughout the different takes of the same passage. These textual characteristics are, therefore, likely to be deliberate and used rhetorically, reminiscent of practices associated with spontaneously produced language (see Hansen 2012). Rather than simply being evoked by modality restrictions, however, the issue becomes a matter of adhering to social practices at home in target cultural contexts. The translator contextualizes this as follows: “...I’m sure that the BSL text is kind of flatter in lots of ways [than it would be in dialogue situations or spontaneously produced BSL], and possibly less easy for the end-user to engage with immediately” (I1: 997–8). Conscious that BSL users are less practiced in accessing “flat” signed text than people are when working with written text, the translator attempts to counter this aspect by including elements, which she describes to be “far more informal than you would find in the original text” (I1: 1022–3), elements that “are designed to be pseudo-interactive, [...] to kind of lull people into a false sense of security” (I1: 1024–5). She presents the example of translating references to the literature, particularly the notion “cf.”:

...if it’s “cf. such and such”, I will sometimes say things like “WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THAT, TAKE A LOOK AT SUCH AND SUCH”, and [...] the “TAKE A LOOK AT”, [...] is really not very formal, and “DO YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT THAT” is really not the equivalent of “cf.”. But I would introduce those kinds of things to make it feel a little bit more comfortable because I’m aware [...] that [...] people are less familiar with how to interact and what to expect than people are with a written English text. (I1: 1025–31)

Revealing the influence from more established sign genres, she adds: “some of the [...] cultural practices are more TV than academic text construction. And yet, the content is academic” (I1: 1049).

A similar example is the introduction of what the translator calls “meta comments” (I1: 1347), fairly empty comments typically occurring at the end of a paragraph break, which at some point during the retrospective interview the translator voices over as “Ooh, wasn’t that interesting” (I1: 1084). An example is a gesture in which both hands, in slightly different vertical positioning, are faced upwards together with a head-tilt and pursed lips, eyegaze directed at the audience. At points these comments become more lexicalized, e.g., a sign which may be glossed as “SURPRISING,” or the sign “INTERESTING,” all articulated with her eyes directed straight at the camera. These gestures are reminiscent of turn-taking signals described by Hansen (2012). While these are indications to pass on the floor to an interlocutor in a face-to-face situation, here the invitation is more symbolic; the function is to invite the target audience to reflect on the preceding information. Like paragraph breaks in written text, these features break up the signed text, providing the audience with a breathing space to absorb the information and produce an internal response. Referring again to the fact that the practice of recording signed language is still in its infancy without a large body of parallel texts, the translator aims to incorporate elements of indigenous sign language practices that Deaf people are more familiar with from other, non-recorded, signed domains and contexts, such as television and academic lectures.

The end result: A hybrid

Conscious that she combines an import of source cultural practices with elements that she borrows from other sign language genres, the translator describes the end result as a “hybrid” text (I3: 692), a text which is “trying to be a native BSL text, but [which...] doesn’t get there because it’s still bound by some of the strictures of the fact that it’s come from this particular kind of English text” (I2: 858). Rather than only referring to her own target text creation, she here alludes to the stage of producing recorded signed text more generally and the fact that there is no substantial body of indigenously created recorded academic texts that could be used as parallel texts. Due to her non-nativeness and position in the Deaf community as a hearing person, she feels that she faces limitations in terms of creating a radically different text, pondering that “the ultimate — [...] ‘entirely BSL’ — academic text would be an entirely different being, [...] completely different creature, structured differently from start to finish” (I3: 872–4). However, highlighting the influential status of translations to stimulate growth of recorded signed texts, the translator describes the translation as a “bridge for people who come afterwards” (I2: 864), Deaf people who she expects will be “pioneers” (I2: 865) to start developing signed academic texts indigenously, without direct reference to

written texts. For now, the text “is a kind of aid, [...] a kind of study key, study guide or something. Once they’ve [worked with these kinds of texts...], then they will produce whatever the native form is supposed to look like” (I2: 866–8). She speculates how written-to-signed translation practices may develop:

...I don’t know what effect that will have on translations. Whether that will mean that translations and the expectation of translation is then that such texts [...] are translated hugely into a signed text or whether the expectation is that these will be somehow kind of almost transliterated. You know, that they’ll be kept in their English but translated to a visual medium, and bilingual Deaf people will access both. You know, I don’t know what the expectations will be. (I2: 888–93)

These thought processes refer to the social and cultural relevance of recorded signing as well as the role of translation practices. The task of creating target text solutions then goes beyond the consideration of the immediate aim of a translation and the boundaries and potentials provided by the modalities and media; instead, the outcome pays attention to the wider social practices, both in regard to Deaf people’s signing and literacy practices more generally, as well as in terms of wider norms associated with translation practices, situated in particular social, cultural, and historical contexts.

Conclusion

The academic source text of this study is situated in globally dominant literacy practices with a long tradition. The context of the target text, however, is more complex. The dominant Hearing literacy practices associated with the source text are socially equally relevant for the Deaf target audience as for predominantly Hearing source text audiences, since Deaf people are expected to participate in social activities of the wider Hearing communities. Texts produced in signed language on the subject matter with the same level of authority are scarce, if not non-existent. It is no surprise that a university program aimed at British Deaf students resorts to using English texts as their core reading material. A translation into BSL enables Deaf second-language users of English to familiarize themselves with complex subject matter without being distracted by linguistic challenges. As we have seen, there is another factor, however; English, and particularly academic English, is intrinsically connected with institutional, colonial, settings for many Deaf people. There is thus a tension between enabling Deaf people to participate in Hearing literacy practices and finding the means of

creating a culturally-relevant context that avoids being, to use Turner's (2007: 121) words cited above, "a reminder of Deaf people's status as outsiders." The sheer fact that the source text has been translated into a signed language can be seen as a means of achieving this. It is an indication that the program management is keen to promote the use of sign language texts. As the translator mentions, the translation may furthermore act as a springboard for further development of recorded signed texts in academic domains by Deaf people themselves, which is likely not only to promote the status of recorded signed texts but also to stimulate activities of Deaf sign language users who feel less comfortable producing texts in English. Translation becomes a key contributor to developing practices around recorded signed texts. Particularly focusing on the translator's motivations for developing translation strategies, this case study revealed the translator's culture-sensitive approach of making the target text meaningful, usable and socially relevant to its target audience. Next to the translator's social and linguistic considerations, the materiality of source and target modes actively impacted on her creation of the target text. Source and target text affordances differed considerably in terms of editability, meaning-making potential and opportunity for interaction. While academic writing is characterized by a high amount of editing, a certain number of performance errors seems acceptable and in moderation even desirable in this signed target text, loosening up an otherwise too 'flat' signed text. Whereas written text uses layout such as paragraph breaks in order to break up a text and encourage readers to reflect on its content, the target text made invitations to reflect more explicit, verbalized through elements which resemble turn-taking signals of dialogue communication, described by the translator as "meta comments." The translator particularly emphasized strategies that picked up on the source text affordances of allowing the reader to physically engage with the text, something which the sign language text does not allow. By incorporating written text in the form of intertitles and subtitles, however, drawing on the potentials offered through a multimodal format, together with the program coordinator she developed creative solutions to maximize ability to interact with the text.

Rather than working with the texts' affordances in isolation, it is apparent that the above choices only became meaningful when considering the more immediate context of this translation event. The translator and program coordinator collaboratively developed an overall aim that informed her decision-making process, taking into consideration the people involved and how they may use the text. Sensitive to Hearing literacy practices, and the socially and ideologically situated domain of academic education, as well as wider communication practices at home in Deaf communities, the translator employed strategies

that aimed to negotiate familiarity of indigenous signing practices while providing the audience access to Hearing academic practices. She thereby addresses the social requirements put upon a minority community which is socially and geographically embedded within a more dominant society. The target text's "hybrid" status is thus representative of the hybrid state in which the Deaf community finds itself. The political implications and the role translation plays in perpetuating the dominance of colonial Hearing practices in Deaf communities and, reversely, how translation may be used to promote indigenous Deaf practices both within Deaf communities but also in Hearing domains remain to be explored elsewhere.

The discussion demonstrates that considerations of modality affordances, the translation event, wider social practices and ideological undercurrents are intrinsically interlinked and only artificially separable in the translation of written into signed text. One case study is not enough to draw generalizable conclusions, and this study can only comment on this specific translator's individual approach in this particular context. More data are needed to explore how practices involving recorded signed languages are developing, both through translation and when indigenously produced. This study is limited by the lack of data concerning the recipients of this translation, the target audience. Further research should emphasize a Deaf perspective. How do Deaf people engage with recorded signed texts? When are recorded signed texts practical, and culturally and socially meaningful to Deaf communities? Taking into account not only Deaf text producers, but also Deaf target audiences, will be crucial to allow for a holistic conceptualization of the complex relationships between affordances, events and practices in translations between written and signed language.

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