Book Review: Team Interpreting as Collaboration and Interdependence

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Team Interpreting as Collaboration and Interdependence

Hoza, J. (2010). *Team Interpreting as Collaboration and Interdependence.* **Alexandria, VA: RID Press. 214 pages. Paperback.**

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In an effort to capture the professional practices embedded in the collaborated work effort of interpreting colleagues, Jack Hoza has documented his findings from two studies on team interpreting. His book, entitled *Team Interpreting as Collaboration and Interdependence,* offers a rich and insightful examination of the strategies employed by interpreters when working together to achieve successful interpretations, and their observations about the effectiveness of the collaborative process. Hoza's premise is that team interpreting is an evolving process that is going through a paradigm shift from a view of teaming as shared (but not collaborated) work, to monitored work, and ideally to collaborative and interdependent work centered on creating and sustaining quality peer relationships and interpretations. His aim is to provide a conceptual framework to further the paradigm of team interpreting as a highly collaborative and interdependent process. A study of this topic is both timely and essential, as most of our understanding of team interpreting has been anecdotal and related scholarship is scant.

The two studies, which form the foundation for the book, involve data collected from hearing interpreters. The first study involved three interpreting teams—a total of six interpreters. Each team was engaged in three phases of investigation—1) a pre-session where they discussed expectations and strategies for working collaboratively, 2) the collaborated interpretation of a panel of Deaf individuals speaking about Deaf Education, and 3) a follow-up interview to discuss the teamed work and team interpreting in general. The second study was a national survey intended to collect data from a larger pool of practitioners about

how they approach and perceive team interpreting. A total of forty-six certified interpreters responded. The survey responses provide a broader and more comprehensive perspective on how team interpreting is approached and perceived within our field.

The author is diligent in his efforts to build on the existing scholarship in the field. Although there is limited scholarship related to team interpreting, Hoza situates his findings squarely in relationship to other studies and weaves into the discussion a broad base of theories relating to interpreting. His commitment to embedding his work into the broader landscape of interpreting literature is one of the strengths of the book.

In addition to these valuable elements of this work, there are areas of concern. The sampling in both studies is small, which means caution should exercised in attempting to generalize the findings and further studies in this area should be encouraged to see if similar findings are replicated. As well, the reporting of the data is weak in a few areas, leaving the reader with questions regarding how some of the findings are organized and reported. As illustration, in discussing what surfaced as the four (4) key features of an effective interpreting team, there are differences reported by the three interpreting teams and the survey respondents. However, instead of exploring these differences more thoroughly, the differences are minimized in favor of responses that were not among the top four for both groups. Specifically, the three interpreting teams from the first study identified a) the personal characteristics and skills of the team interpreters, b) a shared philosophical understanding or schema of the interpreting process and teaming, c) the interpersonal relationship of the team members, and d) the level of trust and commitment to the teaming process and successful interpretation. The number or percentages of team members who identified these four features is not specified. Conversely, the survey respondents identified a) pre- and post-assignment discussions (34.8%), b) good and on-going communication (32.6%), c) engagement in the interpreting work during the assignment (28.3%), and d) knowing each other's strengths and weaknesses, working style and needs in order to work best together (23.9%). Yet, in an attempt to collapse the data from the two studies into a common framework, lower survey responses relating to personal characteristics and skills (17%) and philosophy and schema (4.3%) are used to illustrate the correlation between the two studies (p. 45).

There are also some noticeable gaps in the discussion of team interpreting. One gap relates to when interpreting teams should be utilized and how the systems in which interpreters work can be educated regarding the necessity, benefit, practices and costs associated with team interpreting. Unfortunately, the book fails to address this area of team interpreting in a meaningful way. There is a cursory discussion early in the text (p. 1) about some of the factors and conditions that may warrant the use of interpreting teams—such as length of assignment, content density or unique linguistic and/or cultural demands—but these factors are not explored further in either of the studies. So, although participants in the survey were asked about how frequently they engaged in team interpreting (31.3% of assignments), the factors and conditions that exist and warrant the use of teams was not explored. The absence of this information is significant in that real and perceived system-based barriers to team interpreting exist and practitioners are often ill equipped to justify the cost of an interpreting team in the current economic climate.

Another gap relates to the inclusion of interpreting teams comprised of deaf and hearing interpreters. This topic is closely related to when interpreting teams should be utilized—and specifically how these factors and conditions impact decisions about the composition of teams. The use of teams comprised of both deaf and hearing interpreters is growing, particularly in high-risk settings such as medical and legal. It is the high-risk nature of many of the situations in which deaf and hearing teams collaborate that warrants inclusion in a groundbreaking, first-of-its-kind text on team interpreting. The complexities that surface in such situations reveal the complex demands and controls used by practitioners to achieve a collaborated and interdependent work product. Hoza suggests that "many of the principles presented in the text are applicable to teams of more than two interpreters, teams of Deaf and hearing,…. (p. 2)." However, there is no data collected or discussion provided that illustrates such application. Nor is it clear whether the survey responses addressing the frequency of team interpreting are reporting only those situations involving two hearing interpreters, or other compositions of teams. The survey question is stated as "Approximately what percentage of your interpreting work involves working as a team (p. 192)."

However, in spite of these concerns, the book has much to

offer and makes an important contribution to our understanding of team interpreting. The conceptual framework for team interpreting as a model of collaboration and interdependence unfolds over ten chapters—each addressing a particular element of team interpreting or discussing one of the phases of the team interpreting process that were investigated. For example, Chapter 4 discusses the pre-assignment session and its contribution towards developing a plan of action for the team and how team members will relate to each other in order to accomplish the work. The findings from the two studies underscore the importance of this session in setting the tone for what transpires thereafter. Additionally, practitioners who engage in team interpreting will benefit greatly from the practical discussion of teaming strategies in Chapters 5 and 6. Of particular interest is the author's distinction regarding types of feeds and their frequency of occurrence during the first study. What these practical strategies for team interpreting and their application by the three teams promote is an appreciation that the needs of a team vary and effective teams are able to adapt to the needs of the team members.

As the author seeks to promote a paradigm shift in how team interpreting is perceived and applied, Hoza uses Chapter 9 to discuss the nature of change and the potential barriers to change. By recognizing the historic roots of interpreting practice—where interpreters have been socialized and conditioned to work primarily alone and sometimes endure difficult working conditions—the author paves the way for practitioners to advance their work at three important levels—the personal (how they perceive themselves and their work), discussing the work (how to discuss the work in a way that fosters exploration and reflection), and abstract framing (what theories and terminology are used to create a common framework for discussing the work). This chapter offers rich discussion and examples of each of these three levels and their application to the day-to-day experiences of interpreters.

The culmination of Hoza's work is a model of the team interpreting process discussed in Chapter 10, which is focused on three primary types of interaction that form the basis for collaborated and interdependent work—how the team prepares and connects prior to the actual assignment, how the team works collaboratively and interdependently during the interpretation, and how the team processes its work after the

assignment. In all three types of interaction, the focus is both on process (how the team relates to one another and engages in its work) and product (how the collaborative process will produce an accurate and meaningful target language equivalent).

Ultimately, the data collected and interpreted in this book reveals the complex process involved in working within a team. Hoza builds on existing scholarship to make a strong case for approaching team interpreting as a highly collaborative and interdependent process. He offers specific and practical strategies for advancing readiness to work within a team and for creating teams that are highly productive and effective both in terms of process and product. And he offers a data-driven model of team interpreting that is based on collaboration and interdependence. This book is an important read and resource for all aspiring and working practitioners who embrace our collective growth and believe in the increased capacity that results from our working in teams.