

**Kayoko Takeda & Jesus Baigorri-Jalon (eds.), *New Insights in the History of Interpreting*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 2016, 278 pp.**

Understanding the past of a discipline is crucial in order to contextualise it in the now, as well as in relation to the future. In this, the field of interpreting studies is no exception. This compilation on the history of interpreting, which provides an insight into the evolution of the profession, is a valuable contribution to our field. The volume includes, but is not limited to, papers from the First International Symposium on the History of Interpreting, held at Rikkyo University in Tokyo in May 2014, a landmark event in for research on the history of interpreting.

Although there have been significant case studies (Torikai, 2008; Takeda, 2010; Lung, 2011; Baigorri-Jalon, 2014/2000) and compilations (Bowen & Bowen, 1990; Kurz & Bowen, 1999), there is a noticeable scarcity of research on the history of interpreting. Historical and archival studies are much more common in research dealing with the translation of written texts, with interpreting studies continuing to be a gap in the history of the field. A possible reason for this is the nature of speech, which is ephemeral, and the fact that it is a challenge to find and access historical archives and records. This is a demanding task that requires the identification of these sources as well as the appropriate methodologies to analyse and explain them. As seen in the contributions to this volume, there are various perspectives and paradigms within which to conduct research in a historical framework. However, interpreting does not take place in a void, and must therefore be looked at within its context. As mentioned in the introduction to this volume, interpreted events always involve people; interpreting takes place within a situational and institutional context, and involves a variety of micro- and macro-level factors that have an influence on the interpreting act. The micro-level factors include aspects related to the speech itself—the forms of address, speech dynamics, voice quality, etc.—whereas the macro-level factors include the interpreter's role, user expectations, codes of ethics and norms, power relations between the end-users and interpreters and between the various end-users themselves, the educational and socio-cultural background of the interpreter(s), and the overall situational, socio-cultural and institutional contexts where interpreting is performed. Thus, compared to an interpreted interaction that took place in the not-so-distant past or in the present, it can be much more challenging to identify, access, and analyse personal accounts and historical records related to historical interpreting events in order to reflect the factors that impact the historical framework. Nevertheless, this should not be considered an impossible task, especially when we take into account the contributions to this volume, in which clearly diligent efforts were made to overcome these obstacles.

The chapter by Rachel Lung analyses the tasks and roles—including those that go beyond the specific task of interpreting—of Sillan interpreters back in the latter half of the first millennium in East Asia. The visibility of these interpreters, and the fact that their role was not limited to interpreting—similar to interpreters in the Roman Empire—makes us reflect on the understanding of the role of the interpreter throughout history and today. In the following chapter Iciar Alonso-Araguas presents another ‘critical link’ role assumed by historical interpreters during the early colonial administration in sixteenth-century New Spain. Drawing on primary and secondary sources, the case study includes examples of interpreters’ recruitment and involvement in linguistic and cultural practices as proof of the institutionalisation of linguistic and cultural mediation practices in the early stages of Spanish colonial rule. These practices also reflect the colonial authorities’ recognition of the local population’s linguistic rights and cultural diversity, an initiative—as pointed out by the author—similar to present-day public service interpreting. Research on the history of interpreting allows us to see the evolution of practices as well as concepts, which paves the way for forming the bigger picture of our field. Marcos Sarmiento-Perez contributes to this picture by presenting the case of legal interpreting for the Spanish Inquisition. Multilingualism was one of the unique features of the Inquisition, which led to the need for interpreters in cases where subjects did not speak the language of the Tribunal. The interpreters’ work was similar to today’s court interpreting, however with strict secrecy imposed by the Inquisition. This chapter provides a broad overview of the issue, looking at a range of aspects from the activities of the Inquisition in which interpreting was required, to the status, requisites, categories and appointment of interpreters, as well as regulations concerning their activity. The following chapter, by Torikai Kumiko, focuses on interpreters in the Japanese city of Nagasaki in the contact with Western powers between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, by looking at four historical novels by Yoshimura Akira. In this chapter, we see fiction being used as an interesting tool to use to explore the interpreter’s role in history.

The chapter by David. B. Sawyer is based on the author’s research on the Corps of Student Interpreters programme established by the United States Department of State with the aim of providing in-country language training in China, Japan and Turkey. Using administrative and personal accounts, the author focuses on the programme as implemented in China. In the following chapter Sergei Chernov provides new evidence on the early use of simultaneous interpreting in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s. The author presents first-hand information regarding early experiments in simultaneous interpreting, Soviet-designed simultaneous interpreting devices, and the working conditions at that particular place and time in history. This chapter is followed by an exploration of

photographs of simultaneous interpreters and their working environment in the early years of the United Nations (UN) by Jesus Baigorri-Jalon. The analysis of the factors that make up the context in which these photographs were produced—the relations between the interpreters and the audience, the institutional and political contexts—contributes to a historical perspective on simultaneous interpreting at the UN.

The last three chapters address the interpreter's role in conflict: an issue that gives rise to ethical questions and that is much debated in recent interpreting research. Shi-chi Mike Lan and Kayoko Takeda focus on interpreters who were prosecuted in post-war trials for Japanese war crimes, leading to a rich description of this situational context in history. Anthony Pym discusses an interpreted interaction between US military forces and local Afghan populations from a risk management perspective, which could be helpful in understanding and assessing interpreter behaviour in other conflict situations.

Overall, this edited volume provides interpreting researchers with valuable information on the interpreter's role, as well as an insight into the practices, standards and ethics of interpreting at various times and places in history, making it possible to draw parallels with interpreters and interpreting today and to see interpreting as part of a broader continuum.

#### References

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Şeyda ERASLAN  
Dokuz Eylül University