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**RECYCLED
INFORMATION
AS A QUESTIONING
STRATEGY
PITFALLS IN
INTERPRETER-
MEDIATED TALK**

by Cecilia Wadensjö



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Field of research:

Interpreter-mediated interaction in various settings
– legal, health care, social security, radio,
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INTERPRETERS AND SOCIETY

- Interpreters as actors within the *system of society* : must protect the rights of the non-Swedish-speaking party
- Interpreters as actors within the *system of control* : must protect the social and legal system

However, they are often perceived as passive tools switching between two languages

- Necessary evil (?)



ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF THE INTERPRETER

When studying the role of interpreter-mediated communications, we can start from two different points of view.

NOTE! the one does not exclude the other

Talk as text production

- Deal with the same issues on which we focus when we deal with two written texts
- omissions or distortions

Talk as activity

- Analyse the multiple functions of talk in actual interactions
- what is peculiar about this type of communication?

THE POLICE INTERROGATION

Authentic case of an interpreter-mediated police interrogation with more than two people involved

→ police officer + suspect + interpreter

Utterances by the monolingual party will have two functions:

1. proposition for the **other interlocutor** to react upon
2. proposition for the **interpreter** to react upon



WHAT HAPPENS TO QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES CONVENTIONALLY USED IN INTERROGATIONS WHEN THE QUESTIONING IS DONE WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF AN INTERPRETER?

FOCUS: the police officer's strategies for eliciting from the suspect her spontaneous story about the case

→ the functions of the questioning strategies **can be affected substantially** by the dynamics of this three-party communication.



THE CASE

CONTEXT

The facts:

- Interrogation concerning a minor theft in Sweeden, namely shoplifting;
- The suspect is a young, Russian-speaking woman, Sasha;
- One of three partners in crime. Rita had been previously interrogated.

The interpreter:

- Certified, experienced interpreter, aware of the Interpreters' Code of Ethics;
- The officer, Peter, had worked with the interpreter, Irina, before.
- Both preferred the suspect to be addressed directly. They did so.



CONTEXT

The Recordings:

- Made during the second round of interrogations, the first by Peter and Irina;
- The first round had been carried out in English right after the theft;
- An assistant shows the suspect stolen items drawn from a bag.

The Excerpts:

- Drawn during the last third of the encounter. All the items have been shown;
- Sasha denies knowledge, but Rita has said otherwise;
- Peter uses the “Recycling of information” principle to obtain more information.



RECYCLING OF INFORMATION

Excerpt 1 (7:11) (cf. transcription conventions below)³

- > 364 Peter: men Rita säger ju det. att ni gick alla tre,
but Rita says like this. that you went all three,
365. Irina: а Рита так говорит что вы туда все трое
пошли.
but Rita so says that all three of you went there.
- 366 Sasha: а я так не говорю.
but I don't say so.
367. Irina: men jag säger inte så.
but I don't say so.
(1.0)
368. Peter: men va e:::h va säger-? då::: (.) ljuger Rita?
but what e:::h what says-? then::: (.) is Rita lying?
369. Irina: но::: что тогда сказать что кто-то из вас,
е::: лжёт?
but::: what then [one can] say that one of you e:::h is
lying?

370. Sasha: наверно.
perhaps.
(1.5)
371. Irina: °kan hända.°
°might be.°
372. Peter: kan hända?
might be?
373. Irina: наверно?
perhaps?
(2.0)
374. Peter: ljuger hon?
is she lying?
375. Irina: она лжёт?
is she lying?
(1.5)
375. Sasha: наверно. я говорю что я про этот бокс
ничего не знаю.
perhaps. I say that I about this locker don't know anything .

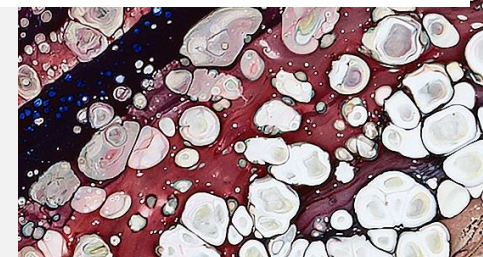
RECYCLING OF INFORMATION

There are three basic strategies to put the “Recycling of information” principle into practice:

- 1.Quotes from documents or absent persons;
- 2.Formulations, an account of the preceding turns offered for approval;
- 3.Quotes from the immediately preceding statement.



QUOTES FROM DOCUMENTS OR ABSENT PERSONS



445. Peter: vad säger du om att Rita e::h (.) påstår att du har varit med in och köpt ett par skor och att du och den här karln var borta och låste in dom här. (1.5) dom andra sakerna i en box. vad tycker du om det?
what do you say about that Rita e::h (.) claims that you have been in with [her] and bought a pair of shoes and that you and this guy went away and locked these things up. (1.5) these other things in a locker. what do you think about that?
446. Irina: а что вы думаете о том что вот Рита утверждает что вы были с ней в магазине купили туфли. что вы с этим мужчиной закрывали вещи в бокс. что вы об этом думаете?
and what do you think about this that like Rita claims that you were with her in a shop [and] bought shoes. that you and this man locked up things in a locker. what do you think about this?
447. Peter: du är misstänkt för stöld, alternativt häleri,
439. Peter: hon säger, (.) indirekt, (.) att dom andra sakerna tillhör ju er.
she says, (.) indirectly, (.) that the other things belong to you.
440. Irina: и::: опосредственно, она говорит что все другие вещи вам принадлежат.
and::: and indirectly, she says that all the other things belong to you.
441. Peter: och inte henne.
and not her.
442. Irina: а не ей.
and not her.
443. Sasha: я могу сказать что из всех вот этих вещей мне не принадлежит ничего.
I can say that of all these things nothing belongs to me.
444. Irina: jag kan säga att bland alla dom här sakerna som finns här, hör till mig ingenting.
I can say that among all these things that are here, belongs to me nothing.
448. Irina: you are suspected of theft, alternatively of receiving stolen property,
вы
449. Sasha: уом я думаю это ситуация е:: мм. (1.0) когда (2.0) кто-то пытается выгородить себя.
I think this is a situation e:: mm. (1.0) when (2.0) someone is trying to get away.
450. Irina: (1.0) °mhm° det är någon eh försöker faktiskt e::h (1.0) e::h m::: (.) komma undan.
°mhm° it's someone eh is trying actually e::h (1.0) e::h m::: (.) to get away.
451. Peter: någon? vilken någon?
someone? which someone?
452. Irina: а кто? (0.5) кого вы имеете в виду?
and who? (0.5) who do you have in mind?
453. Sasha: я не знаю.
I don't know.

QUOTES FROM DOCUMENTS OR ABSENT PERSONS

1. Excerpt 1

- The officer presents himself as a mediator, appearing less threatening;
- Sasha does not respond well to this strategy, starts questioning what Peter is reporting from Rita's interrogation.

2. Excerpt 2

- Pronouns issue, Sasha feels Rita has blamed her in the words of the officer;
- Information on the seriousness of the situation is lost because of the interpreter.



FORMULATIONS.

“but what e:::h what says-) then::: (.) is Rita lying?”

OFFICER:

-simple **yes/no** question

INTERPRETER:

- sees it as a **formulation**

Why?

Different mode of listening

- **Interpreting norm:** same importance to every element of the utterance.



FORMAT TYING.

- > 364 Peter: men **Rita** säger ju det. att ni gick alla tre,
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пошли.
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but::: what then [one can] say that one of you e:::h is lying?

FORMAT TYING

SUSPECT:

-stress on **pronoun**

INTERPRETER:

- stress on **verb**

Consequence?

- Change in pragmatic meaning
- Office uses the technique on the wrong part of the utterance.

The **intentionality** of the original utterance is therefore **modified** in the translation,



FORMAT TYING

370. Sasha: наверно.
 perhaps.
 (1.5)
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 °*might be.*°
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FORMAT TYING

The officer repeats the word of the suspect, but changing intonation

SUSPECT:

-Doesn't reply immediately

OFFICER:

- immediately asks another question

How did the interpreter help?

**She used the same exact word she used before,
understanding which technique the officer was
using.**

The interpreter-mediated conversation has a potential impact on the interlocutors' spontaneity



FORMAT TYING

What can influence the interrogation?

- **context** provided by the officers to the interpreter

Changes in **prosody** lead to different ways of understanding the aim of the question

Ex. Stress on **verb**: focus on **action**.
Stress on **pronoun**: focus on **actor**.



DIRECT AND INDIRECT ADDRESS

monolingual parties should address each other directly.

OFFICER

-addresses **both** parties

INTERPRETER AND SUSPECT

- stress on **verb**

What's worth noticing?

- the officer thinks he followed this mode of communicating
- the shift in addressing was related to physical activities



FOUR CATEGORIES OF ADDRESS

- Talk divided in TURNS (587 TOTAL)
- Categorized according to the pronouns they contain

Table 1. Categories of address in police interrogation

Address	P (n=178)	I(vP) (n=149)	S (n=118)	I(vS) (n=123)	I(vI) (n=4)
indirect	45	0	0	0	0
"we"	6	4	1	2	0
direct	36	82	6	7	0
none	90	63	111	114	4

Figures in parentheses = total number of turns. P = Peter, I(vP) = Irina voicing Peter, etc. For the sake of simplicity, the assistant's turns are not included.

- *INDIRECT* (he, she, they, one)
- *SIMULTANEOUSLY INDIRECTLY AND DIRECTLY* (we)
- *DIRECTLY* (e.g. swedish *du, ni*)
- *NO ADDRESS* (no pronouns)



FOUR CATEGORIES OF ADDRESS

- Interpreter never talks *about* the suspect
- Irina directly addresses the suspect - "*you*"
- *Direct address* – the interpreter this way can entertain and strengthen a common focus of interaction and the illusion of a direct exchange between monolingual parties



THE CASE REVISITED

- Interpreter coordinates talk by direct address
- 'someone? Which someone?' Format tying type question
- *latching-on-to-a-word* function becomes a brief silence
- Direct address of the monolingual counterpart
- She urges the suspect to talk less face-threatening
- Irina protects her detached middle position



CONCLUDING REMARKS

- Quality is a matter of perspective
- Talk as texts
- More detail in the textual structure = more knowledge from the text-oriented analysis
- Factors that do not lend themselves to evaluation:
 - timing
 - ability to mediate
 - sustain a focus of interaction
 - keep alive the illusion of non-mediated interaction



CONCLUDING REMARKS

- Interactive conventions followed real-life encounters
- 3 types of questioning techniques
- Monolingual dyad is the norm
- Contsillation of 3 participants and their linguistic proficiencies can make a significant difference
- Interpreting as interaction
- Interpreter functions: translating and coordinating
- Two-language talk as social activity

