

Interpreting in a Community of Practice: a sociolinguistic study of the signed language interpreter's role in workplace discourse

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the role of signed language interpreters (SLIs) in the workplace, a setting which presents challenges in terms of role, boundaries and interaction with deaf and hearing employees. The key research aims were to determine how primary participants understand the role of the SLI, and how this influences the dynamics of everyday interaction. Specific attention was paid to norms of discourse and shared repertoires within a workplace Community of Practice (CofP). A detailed description of the interpreting process was thus generated, enabling a deeper appreciation of workplace dialogue where the SLI is an active third participant.

The research takes a linguistic ethnographic approach to examining signed language interpreting within the workplace. Data were collected through the use of questionnaires, practitioner journals, video-recorded interpreted interaction gathered in workplace settings, and video playback interviews.

Findings show that the SLI has a considerable impact on the ways in which members of a CofP interact, specifically in relation to small talk, humorous exchanges and participation in the collaborative floor. The SLI's management of these aspects of workplace discourse influences the extent to which collegial relations can be established between employees. These findings have significance in relation to the training and education of SLIs, as well as their practice in this domain. The findings also demonstrate the need for all participants to re-evaluate their understanding of interpreted workplace discourse, moving towards a collaborative approach.

KEYWORDS: community of practice, humour, signed language interpreting, small talk, workplace discourse.

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