KANSAI GAIDAI UNIVERSITY

A Review of "Narrative Construction in Interpreted Police Interviews"

A Review of "Narrative Construction in Interpreted Police Interviews"

Emi Shinohara

This review will first briefly summarize "Narrative Construction in Interpreted Police Interviews" (Nakane, 2020) to introduce its purpose, the kind of data collected, the kind of analysis conducted, and its main findings. Next, it will discuss how the findings relate to my professional experience. It will then provide a discussion of what I would add to the analysis, using the perspective of a former police interpreter. Finally, the paper will end with the broader implications of the study.

In "Narrative Construction in Interpreted Police Interviews," Nakane (2020) aimed to elucidate: (1) "the impact of interpreter mediation on the construction of narratives in police interviews" and (2) "challenges for interpreters in achieving a pragmatic[1] equivalence of force and quality of strategies" (p. 180). The data collected were: audio-recordings of two Australian Federal Police interviews to which the author was given access through attorneys. The suspects in both interviews were native speakers of Japanese alleged to have smuggled illegal narcotics. Both denied the allegation and claimed that they had no knowledge of the substance. The interviews were transcribed by the author. For further details of the data, see Appendix 1.

The analysis was conducted using three aspects of tripartite interaction relevant for narrative construction: (1) turn-taking; (2) questioning strategies; and (3) resistance strategies. First, the analysis of turn-taking revealed that the timing of a translation could affect coherence and completeness of the narratives. For instance, the study found that the interpreter and the primary speaker(s) at times competed for the floor, resulting in overlapping talk and interruptions and blocking the interpreter from translating the overlapped or interrupted utterances. The non-translations led to fragmentations of the narratives, and as a consequence, a piece of important information became lost (Excerpt 9.1). Furthermore, when the interviewer (presumably) believed that the end of a translation indicated the end of the interviewee's answer, the investigator pressed on with the next question, preventing the suspect from completing his narrative (Excerpt 9.2). In sum, the

additional layer of interpreter mediation complicated the process of turn-taking and could affect coherence and completeness of the narratives (Nakane, 2020, pp. 181-185).

Second, distortions of questioning strategies through interpreter-mediated interaction could affect narrative construction efforts by police interviewers and suspects. For example, when the interviewer challenged the suspect's story by uttering: "So she's [you're] saying …," the intended coercive effect was lost in the translation because the utterance was translated as a yes-or-no question. In the end, the suspect's response "yes" was (likely to be) understood by the interviewer as her submission to the challenge, while the suspect (probably) simply thought that she answered a question. As a result, the suspect missed a chance to provide counterarguments against the interviewer's challenge (Excerpt 9.3). Another loss of pragmatic force in the translation did not help the suspect to understand the interviewer's metamessage: "You're not a reliable interviewee." Consequently, the suspect was deprived of an opportunity to counter the challenge and offer explanations on her part (Excerpt 9.4).

Third, the pragmatic force of suspects' resistance strategies was not always translated, resulting in the weakening of suspects' versions of events. For example, when the suspect's resistant correction of the interviewer's question was not translated, it resulted in depriving her of an opportunity to highlight her innocence (Excerpt 9.6). In another interaction, the suspect's resistance by contesting the investigator's evaluation of the story was weakened through interpreting because her outright denial was not fully translated (Excerpt 9.7). Sarcasm was another case. When the suspect contested the interviewer's question by being sarcastic, the translation did not communicate his sarcasm to the investigator, resulting in a wrong implication about his role in the crime (Excerpt 9.8). In short, the non- and incomplete translations of the suspects' utterances silenced their resistances in their narrative construction effort.

With respect to the study's relevance to myself, I worked as a police interpreter in Japan for seven years. Thus, Nakane's (2020) study closely resonates with my professional experience. First, the findings confirmed my intuition about what was happening in a police interview. For example, when I was in a police interview room interpreting, I sensed that the three of us (investigator(s), suspect, and interpreter) could be hearing three different stories. For these reasons, I personally appreciate the author for listing the impact of interpreter mediation.

Next, I want to stress that investigators' diversions from normative turn-taking may not be so particular to interpreter-mediated interviews but a reflection of "the unequal power

relations" (Waring, 2018, p 187) exemplified in a police-witness interaction (Fairclough, 1989, p. 18). In this interaction, the investigator did not wait for the witness to finish her line but dismissed her offering of the information on the suspicious man's clothing. I believe that this monolingual interaction is very similar to one of the interactions in Nakane's (2020) study where the investigator pressed on with the next question and prevented the suspect from continuing his narrative. Thus, I argue that interviewees' narratives are vulnerable to fragmentations in both monolingual and bilingual interviews because "existing social conditions, that is, the relationship between the police and the public in the larger society" (Waring, 2018, p 187), allow the investigator to control the course of the interview.

Furthermore, I would expand the discussion of the challenge for interpreters to maintain pragmatic equivalence. Coming from the police interpreter background, I argue that translating pragmatic force is not as straightforward as it may sound. Rather, it challenges the interpreter's face and identities. Reflecting on my own experience, for example, I now see that I was engaging in face-work while interpreting (Goffman, 1967); I wanted to maintain my positive self-image ("I'm a nice, polite person") and thus avoided sounding as coercive as the original utterers. Similarly, to protect my female identity, I kept speaking feminine Japanese in my translations which sounded much softer and more polite than the investigators' rather crude, masculine language. By the same logic, the interpreters in the study might have engaged in face-work and subsequently produced the translations that softened the original questioning and resistance strategies. In short, no matter how professional they are, interpreters are still humans with face and identities. Hence, as long as the interaction is mediated, interpreters face the difficulty of going "out of character."

One more additional thought is that video-recordings could have been better, if that was possible. For instance, I wonder where their gaze was during the interview because, in my experience, both investigators and suspects kept looking at me during their turns. I suspected that by not looking at each other, they were excluding themselves from reading potentially important non-verbal messages. Therefore, if Nakane (2020) could have provided an analysis of what the primary speakers possibly missed from visual information, the findings could be utilized to remind investigators to keep their eye on the suspect and pay close attention to non-verbal signals (Waring, 2018, pp. 106-111).

Turning now to the broader implications of this study, I strongly believe that Nakane's (2020) study has practical values beyond academia. One value is its mention of discourse because, in my experience, the police interpreter training almost exclusively focused on

delivering word-by-word, dictionary-based translations. On the other hand, pragmatic implications went undiscussed or even unrecognized. Hence, the study is significant in that its findings can be utilized to help police interpreters to understand the importance of communicating "beyond each word" and preserving the dynamics of original narrative construction (Nakane, 2020, p. 197).

During the seven years, it was not uncommon to work with investigators who mistakenly believed that as long as words were uttered, the interpreter was able to translate them. Therefore, they freely interrupted during my translation and while the suspect was still delivering his or her answer. I found this habit of the police to be very challenging and even menacing because it led to non- and/or incomplete translations, sometimes causing grave misunderstandings between the interlocutors. Thus, Nakane's (2020) study helps to raise awareness among investigators about how ignoring turn-taking could result in missing an opportunity to elicit potentially important information. In the end, no matter what challenges and complexities interpreter mediation creates, its ultimate goal is to help enable all the interlocutors to equally participate in and be understood in one of the most important interactions one may have in life. Therefore, both police investigators and interpreters must strive in cooperation to achieve this purpose, utilizing research findings such as Nakane's (2020).

Appendix 1: Details of the Data Collected

	Interview 1	Interview 2
Duration	4.5 hours	2 hours
Year	1992	2002
Suspect	L1 Japanese (female)	L1 Japanese (male)
Case	Illegal Narcotics Smuggling	
Allegation	Denied	
Result	Convicted	Acquitted

Note

1) In pragmatics, an utterance must be understood in context and not by its literal meaning. For instance, when a police officer asks a suspect, "Are you telling me the truth?", depending on the context, the officer's question can be understood as "I know you are lying." instead of asking a simple, literal yes-or-no question. A pragmatic force, therefore, refers to the use of language that conveys the meaning/message which goes beyond the literal meaning.

References

Fairclough, N. (1989). Language and power. Longman.

Goffman, E. (1967). On face work. In Interaction ritual (pp. 5-45). Pantheon books.

Nakane, I. (2020). Narrative construction in interpreted police interviews. In M. Mason & F. Rock (Eds.), The discourse of police interviews (pp. 179-199). The University of Chicago Press. 10.7208/chicago/9780226647821.003.0009

Waring, H. Z. (2018). Discourse analysis: The questions discourse analysts ask and how they answer them. Routledge.

（しのはら・えみ　外国語学部講師）