

*Erling Wande\**

## **Translating Machine or Creator? On Finnish-Swedish Community Interpreting in Sweden<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

The paper relates the objectives and preliminary results from a project on Finnish/Swedish community interpreting in Sweden, the so called FIKON-project at the Department of Finnish, Stockholm University (Swed. *Finsk-svensk kontakttolkning i Sverige*). A point of departure for the investigation are the ethical recommendations to interpreters formulated by the Swedish National Board of Trade, according to which the interpreter has to act neutrally and objectively. The data, deriving from 32 tape recordings in four different communicative settings (social insurance office, doctor/patient-conversation, consultation of diabetes nurse and courtroom proceedings), show a considerable deviation in the acting of the interpreters relative to the recommendations. A theoretical framework for the analysis of the data is the *skopos* theory.

In order to meet the demands of interpreters for postwar immigrants to Sweden, the bulk of which was Finnish-speaking, interpreters have been educated and authorized in Sweden from the beginning of the 1970s. The schooling of interpreters has mostly been concerned with community interpreting and instruction has been given by adult education organizations, folk high schools and the universities. The authority in charge of the authorization of interpreters, as well as of translators, was already

---

<sup>1</sup> The author of this paper is the leader of this project (the so called FIKON- project; in Swedish "Finsk-svensk kontakttolkning i Sverige"). Co-workers are BA Birgitta Rompanen and PhD Ulla Lundgren, Department of Finnish. Lundgren, who has been a full-time researcher in the project for a couple of years, has done all the field work and a considerable part of the transcriptions of the recordings and the analysis.

\* *Erling Wande*  
*Department of Finnish*  
*Stockholm University*  
*Universitetsvägen 10 F*  
*106 91 Stockholm (S)*

from the beginning the Swedish Board of Trade (in Swedish *Kommerskollegium*<sup>2</sup>).

The need of interpreting became urgent in connection with the growing immigration flow to Sweden in the 1960s: in factories and at other working-places as well as at authorities this need was paid attention to and the trade unions acted as pressure groups for education and employment of interpreters. In accordance with the aims of Swedish immigration policy interpreting service was looked upon as a right for immigrants. This service is mostly financed by the state.

In connection to education and authorization of community interpreters there arose a need to analyse and define what are the characteristics of a successful interpretation: what is the role of the interpreter in a communication between two differently monolingual persons, what circumstances contribute to a successful resp. unsuccessful interpretation, what factors have to be stressed upon in the education of interpreters and what makes a good base for authorization?

The answers to these questions are, in turn, related to the way, in which the interpretation process and the function of the interpreter is described and analysed. Without any support from research results concerning the connection or association between linguistic, cultural, ethnic or other factors that may be of significance for the interpretation process, the role of the interpreter as a mediator of information has been the defining device for the education and examination. The emphasis has consequently been laid upon linguistic competence and on the role of the interpreter of a neutral, in some sense linguistically objective, recoder of information from one language to another.

This view is reflected in the instructions or ethical recommendations given to community interpreters in Sweden by the Board of Trade: the interpreters should in the first place function as mediators of information, i.e. recoders. In education the emphasis has been on the linguistic competence (in a narrow sense) of the interpreter and the linguistic-semantic equivalence of the interpretation (*God tolksed* 1989).

This is a view which seems to be based on an intuitive analysis of what a successful interpretation should be, more than on a systematic analysis. The influence from scientific research on communication in general does not seem to have influenced the recommendations, not even

---

<sup>2</sup> According to a suggestion in a Swedish official report (autumn 1993) this authority will be reorganized and the responsibility for the authorization of translators and interpreters moved to another authority.

after the scientific investigations on community interpreting in Sweden started publishing the first results a few years ago – this research was especially directed to the *role* of the interpreter and the *interaction* between the agents, not to the linguistic outcome *per se* (cf. the section Research in Sweden below). Nor does the international research outside Sweden seem to have had an impact on the theoretical considerations within the authorities, although e.g. Schlesinger (1991:148), quoting Schackman (1984:19-20), states that: “The prevalent view of the community interpreter is that of a professional who ‘cannot be merely an empty vessel translating words backwards and forwards – a kind of transparent ‘linguistic tube’ ... but must fill in information gaps, explain cultural differences and misunderstandings, explain the thinking of each side to the other and guide both sides towards a successful conclusion”. There are other examples of the same kind, especially in recent literature on translation (cf. also the discussion in Niska 1989).

Even though there is an awareness among practitioners and officials about the discrepancy between theory and practice in community interpreting that this might be something else than what is presupposed in the recommendations – the ethical rules have been much debated – it apparently takes time to implement both concrete experience from the field and new, scientifically based discovery. Some kind of recommendations are by many felt to be needed, but the reformulation of them may be felt difficult or not so urgent. The concepts of neutrality and objectivity seem to be crucial in our type of culture and difficult to get round, but it appears to be an idealization, as is evident also from our data, with regard to what is going on in real community interpreting settings as well as in regard to the views or wishes of at least part of the non-native Finnish-speaking clients who have to or want to use interpreters in their contacts with Swedish officials.

## **1. Research in Sweden**

The research in Sweden on interpreting is fairly new. There were a few studies carried out at Lund University in the beginning of the 1980s (Stroud 1981, Kulick 1982, Vamling 1982), but not until a few years ago there appeared an interest in studying the frequent communicative situations, where interpreters are used within the Swedish society, when immigrants and refugees meet representatives of Swedish authorities, service employees or others. For a long time this has been the main Swedish context for interpreting, due to the fact, among others, that when the

need of interpreting grew bigger there was organized an interpreter service in connection to the immigrant bureaus in the bigger cities. Most of the research during the last years has been directed to discourse analysis – Linköping University has been the leading in this field, with studies on immigrants in the courtroom (e.g. Linell & Jönsson 1986), on the role of the consecutive interpreter (Linell & Wadensjö 1989) and with the first thesis of the field, *Interpreting as Interaction* (Wadensjö 1992). Other projects in Stockholm are one on simultaneous interpreting at the Finnish department (the so called SIM-project, Wande 1990a and 1990b, Niska & Wande, forthc.) and a project on consecutive interpreting in doctor/patient-relations at the Centre for Research on Bilingualism at Stockholm University (Englund-Dimitrova 1991).<sup>3</sup> Several new projects are being planned in Stockholm (Wande et al. 1993).

## 2. The aim of the FIKON-project

This paper presents the aims and preliminary results of an ongoing research project on Finnish-Swedish community interpreting in Sweden at the Department of Finnish at Stockholm University, *Finsk-svensk kontakttolkning i Sverige* (the Swedish short for which is FIKON).<sup>4</sup> The aim of the project is, generally formulated, to explore how interpreting functions in various settings, where Finnish immigrants in Sweden use interpreters in their contacts with Swedish authorities, institutions or officials (visiting a doctor or a diabetic nurse, visiting the local social insurance office, court proceedings.). What really happens in these settings is analysed within the project in relation to the above-mentioned recommendations as well as in relation to modern translation theories (like the *skopos* theory). One reason why it is of special relevance for the situation in Sweden to study *Finnish/Swedish* community interpreting is that this activity has been most frequent from the beginning of the 1970s and still is, contrary to what is sometimes maintained – as mentioned earlier, the Finnish immigrant group has been and still is by far the largest immigrant group in Sweden and the Finnish language is, next to Swedish, the most frequent mother tongue among the inhabitants of Sweden. For the Finnish department this field of research is natural also because the

---

<sup>3</sup> Englund-Dimitrova (1991) analyzes turn-taking and feedback in two videotaped recordings of doctor/patient-interactions. The project is continued with a corpus containing 30 recordings. Cf. also Englund-Dimitrova, forthcoming.

<sup>4</sup> The project is financed by Socialvetenskapliga forskningsrådet (Swedish Council for Social Research) in Sweden.

department has been engaged in forming the university education for interpreters in Sweden since its very beginning in the early 1970s.

In addition, the constellation of languages is interesting from a linguistic-typological point of view. Most studies concerning interpreting, in Europe at least, are concerned with Indo-European language pairs, Russian-English, Russian-Swedish, English-French etc., so, as a byproduct of our investigation we might get interesting contrastive data on various linguistic levels from this confrontation of Finnish with Swedish.

The paper will also take into consideration the possible consequences of two features that seem to have an impact on community interpreting (of the type studied) as a communicative situation, namely the fact that many of the Finnish immigrants using interpreters nowadays know Swedish fairly well, at least receptively, and the fact that community interpreting does not any more seem to be consecutive only, which it is prototypically considered to be, but is often performed as simultaneous interpreting, or “mixed”, sometimes as whispering interpretation, which is especially the case in the courtroom. So at least in the present Swedish situation the clear-cut division that has been applied earlier, namely the one that equals community interpreting with consecutive interpreting and conference interpreting with simultaneous interpreting is not completely true.<sup>5</sup>

### **3. Data and main objectives of the analysis**

As mentioned above the project concerns situations where Finnish immigrants engage an interpreter for a meeting with a Swedish clerk or official. The interpretations in the project have been documented by means of audiotaped recordings. For most of the situations all three parties, the Swedish-speaking official, the interpreter and the Finnish-speaking client have been asked to fill in questionnaires on their opinion of the successfulness of the communication, their experience of interpreted communications, what factors they consider being of importance for a successful

---

<sup>5</sup> The often made distinction, according to which simultaneous interpreting is equalled with conference interpreting and consecutive interpreting with community interpreting is a simplification. Due to tradition but also due to the big audiences consecutive interpreting is the only form of interpreting used e. g. at big religious meetings in the Northern Calotte even after technical possibilities for simultaneous interpreting have been introduced and conference interpreters have been educated in the region (this concerns interpreting between, on the first hand, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish, but also to some extent the Saami language is involved).

interpretation and for the contact between clerk and client, and the like. In some cases informal interviews were performed.

All in all the tape recorded situations are 32, made in four different settings:

1. Social insurance office	15
2. Consulting diabetes nurse	4
3. Doctor/patient	6
4. Courtroom	7

With regard to sex and role in the communicative settings the informants were distributed according to the following categories:

	Swed. officials	Finn.speak. clients	Interpreters
Female	19	16	8
Male	5	16	1

There are, in sum, more than 20 hours of tape recordings.

The tape recordings and the questionnaire data are analysed with the following main questions at issue:

1) What features of the interpretation contribute to its efficiency in the sense that the interpreted party is understood by the other party and gets an adequate reaction to his or her "message", i.e. that the interpretation is successful? What features make it unsuccessful?

2) Does the interpreter act as a neutral recoder or as a negotiator/mediator?

This last-mentioned question is related to the earlier mentioned ethical rules sanctioned by the Swedish National Board of Trade. The basic hypothesis of the project, deriving mainly from experience, is that the interpreter adapts linguistically and also with regard to other aspects of the situation in a way that is not presupposed in the ethical recommendations, i. e. does not act neutrally and objectively in the sense these concepts are used in the ethical recommendations. The analysis concerning these aspects of the recordings are all related to the communicative situation as such but also, at least partly, to various aspects of the linguistic outcome, affecting the communication. An additional approach of analysis that is not, so far, paid attention to but may be done in the future, is an analysis of the different interpreters and their behaviour. Unfortunately there is only one male interpreter, so sex differences cannot be taken into consideration in such an analysis, but an analysis of the interpreters' behaviour could give some indications of what may be general verbal and communicative features in the behaviour of interpreters and what possibly might

be individual features. Such an analysis could also throw light on a possible distinction, hypothesized in this project (as well as in the SIM-project, see the section Research in Sweden in this paper) between what is in the literature called translationese, on one hand, and what could be called "translatorese", individual varieties of the interpreters, individual ways of coping with difficult situations or conventionalized individual habits of interpreting.

#### **4. Preliminary results and observations**

The linguistic data will in the definite analysis be systematically related to the data achieved by the questionnaires and, in some cases, by interviews with the parties. Most of the results referred to below derive from the questionnaires. Some excerpts from the tape-recordings are also presented and commented on. These illustrate cases where the interpreters somehow or other deviate from the norms spelled out in the ethical recommendations.

##### **4.1. The interpreters and the interpreted persons: the typical cases**

On the basis of the questionnaires the following general picture of the three parties involved in the communications is achieved.

*The interpreter* is female (only in one single case the interpretation is performed by a male). She has a formal training (except one), is officially authorized and has often some specialty, e. g. interpreting in medical care. She has at least five years of experience (in some cases up to 17 years) and interpretation is her main occupation. She usually works as an interpreter for 16-20 hours a week.

Some of the interpreters are occupied at big hospitals in the Stockholm region. The courtroom cases are by the interpreters considered the most difficult interpretations.

*The Finnish speaking part* is an immigrant, in average 51 years of age, who as a rule has lived in Sweden for a fairly long time, about 20 years. With regard to possible knowledge of Swedish and use of interpreters this may seem astonishing, but this is partly explainable by the fact that a first generation Finnish immigrant in many parts of Sweden, especially in Stockholm and its surroundings, can live in a fairly Finnish-speaking neighbourhood. All of them use Finnish at work, during leisure time and

at home. At work they also use Swedish to a varying extent. Most of them, however, have Swedish friends, although the number of Swedish friends is lower than that of Finnish friends. The Finnish-speaking part is used to communicate with the help of an interpreter and considers the communication, on average, to function well or very well. – When it comes to the age of the clients, the court room clients, not surprisingly, form an exception; they are younger and have a shorter stay in Sweden behind them than the other subjects of the investigation.

Most of the Finnish immigrants understand Swedish but do not want or do not dare to use it in several of the settings in question. They do not, however, engage professional interpreters in all types of settings where Swedish is needed. When they go to the post or bank office or go shopping they, if they feel the need of it, engage a bilingual friend as an interpreter and help. It is a common feature among Finns that they do not trust their ability to speak Swedish, although their receptive knowledge of the language is good. Most of them are used to use an interpreter, as are the Swedish parts, too.

*The Swedish parts* are in average younger than the Finnish parts. They are accustomed to the communicative situation and have met many Finns as their clients or patients. However, they have hardly any Finns as their private friends. Most of them have visited Finland. As a rule they are of the opinion that interpreting functions well.

## **4.2. How should a good interpreter be?**

There are good correspondencies between the three parties in the opinions, revealed by the questionnaires, about how a good interpreter should be and how she has to act: the interpreter should

- know Swedish and Finnish well,
- know the terminology well,
- have good knowledge about the subject,
- be trustworthy,
- be neutral.

Some of the Swedish parts also expressed the wish that the interpreter should be quick, while many of the Finnish parties wished the interpreters to help and support them, to be on their side. So here we have an explicit wish or request from one of the parties that is in striking contrast to the ethical rules referred to earlier, formulated by the National Board of Trade, and also in contrast to views expressed by the Swedish part. It

is however difficult to see in the recordings whether this difference in opinion affects the communication as such or whether the parties actually are aware of the discrepancy with regard to their respective expectations, expressed in the query. The issue seems to be mostly debated among interpreters and educators. In most of the 32 cases the Swedish and the Finnish-speaking part as well as the interpreters said they were satisfied with the communication and felt it as unproblematic.

### 4.3. Different communicative situations: four examples

In this section four excerpts from the recordings will be presented. These illustrate different types of communicative situations. In the transcriptions overlapping speech passages are underlined.

**4.3.1.** This is a passage from a discussion between an official at the local insurance office and her client. The client has not met the two other persons before, the interpreter and the official have met before a few times. The discussion starts rather formally (on formality, cf. below), but loosens up later to be almost like a chat between two who know each other rather well. The official does not understand Finnish, but now and then during the conversation she gives feedback signals [hm., ja-a] even when the client is speaking (this does not, however, occur in the excerpt presented below). The situation is, on the whole, very informal.

The first passages elucidate the fact that the client understands Swedish — he replies immediately (in Finnish) to the official's uttering before it has been translated into Finnish by the interpreter (consequently the interpreter desists from translating the utterance). The official also comments this fact and the client confirms it with a short reply in Swedish, but then explains that his oral skills are not sufficient. This, in turn, confirms what was observed in the questionnaire, namely that many of the Finns do not trust their oral skills in Swedish in more important or complicated discussions with officials and the like.

**Ex. 1.** A discussion between an official at the local insurance office (O), the client (C) and the interpreter (I).

O: Ja-a. Hm+m. Just det. Hur länge har du varit i Sverige då?

WELL. HM+M, THAT'S RIGHT. FOR HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN STAYING IN SWEDEN THEN?

C: Oi oi, kauanko. En mie kehtaa sannookkaa.

OH DEAR, HOW LONG. I DON'T EVEN DARE TO SAY.

- I: Jag, törs jag inte säga.  
I, I DON'T DARE TO SAY.
- O: Joo, tala om det nu.  
OH YES, TELL ME NOW.
- C: Kaksikymmentä vuotta (skratt).  
FOR TWENTY YEARS (laughter).
- I: Tjugo år.  
FOR TWENTY YEARS.
- O: I tjugo år. // Hur, hur klarar du det här med språket och så, jag, jag tror att du förstår mig ganska väl när jag pratar.  
FOR TWENTY YEARS.// HOW, HOW DO YOU MANAGE THIS WITH THE LANGUAGE AND SO, I THINK THAT YOU UNDERSTAND ME RATHER WELL WHEN I TALK.
- C: Ja+a      Ja+a  
YES          YES
- C: Mun on vaikea sanoa ulos.  
IT'S DIFFICULT FOR ME TO SPEAK OUT.
- I: Ja det, det är precis så det är. Jag har svårt att ut-, få ut språket.  
YES IT, THAT'S EXACTLY THE WAY IT IS. IT'S DIFFICULT FOR ME TO EX-, GET THE LANGUAGE OUT.
- O:                              Ja+a                              Hm+m
- O: Ja+a. Det kan ju också va ett problem med det då man ska hitta nya jobb just det här med språkkunskaper och sånt.  
YES. IT CAN OF COURSE ALSO BE A PROBLEM IN THAT WHEN YOU ARE TO FIND NEW JOBS JUST THIS WITH KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE AND SUCH THINGS.
- C Jo+o, de' e.  
YES, IT IS.
- O: Dom flesta arbetsgivare var man än skall jobba nånstans vill ju gärna att man skall kunna svenska ganska bra.  
MOST EMPLOYERS WHEREVER YOU ARE GOING TO WORK GENERALLY WANT YOU TO KNOW SWEDISH RATHER WELL.
- C: Ja+a.  
Ye+es.
- I: Sehän nyt uutta työ-, työpaikkaa ajatellen niin voi olla vaikea tää kielitaidottomuus koska useimmat työntajathan vaatii että osaa ruotsin suht koht hyvin.  
IT CAN OF COURSE NOW REGARDING A NEW JO-, JOB IT CAN BE DIFFICULT THIS TO HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE OF THE LANGUAGE BECAUSE MOST EMPLOYERS DEMAND THAT YOU KNOW SWEDISH RATHER WELL.

**4.3.2.** Examples 2 and 3 are from discussions between a doctor and his/her patient. In ex. 2 the doctor and the patient have met several times before, it is a routine check. The interpreter and the doctor have met before. The situation is very informal, and the doctor laughs when the patient makes a joke.

**Ex. 2.** A discussion between a doctor (D), the patient (P) and the interpreter (I).

- D: Jaha / och hur står de till?  
WELL / AND HOW ARE YOU?
- I: Kuinka sinä voit?  
HOW ARE YOU FEELING?
- P: No se on toinen päivä parempi ja toinen päivä huonompi.  
WELL, ONE DAY IT IS BETTER AND THE OTHER IT IS WORSE.
- I: Ena dan e de bättre å den andra dan e de sämre.  
ONE DAY IT IS BETTER AND THE OTHER DAY IT IS WORSE.
- D: Jaa+a. Har de blivit någon skillnad sen vi sågs senast i november?  
WELL. HAS THERE BEEN ANY DIFFERENCE SINCE WE LAST MET IN NOVEMBER?
- I: Onko siinä tullu mitään muu-, tapahtunu mitään muutosta siitä kun tavattiin marraskuussa?  
HAS THERE BEEN ANY CHA-, HAPPENED ANY CHANGE SINCE WE MET IN NOVEMBER?
- P: No ehkä. Enempi käytän, jou'un käyttään nitroja.  
WELL MAYBE. I USE MORE, HAVE TO USE NITROS.
- I: Ja möjligen eftersom ja behöver använda nitro lite mer.  
YES POSSIBLY SINCE I NEED TO USE SOME MORE NITROS (a medicin).
- D: Hm. Hur mycket behöver du använda då?  
HM. HOW MUCH DO YOU NEED TO USE THEN?
- I: Kuinka paljon sinä käytät sitä?  
HOW MUCH DO YOU USE OF IT?
- P: No semmosta nyt noin kolmea neljääkin käyttään.  
WELL SOMETHING NOW ABOUT THREE OR EVEN FOUR I USE.
- I: Tre, fyra.  
THREE, FOUR.
- D: Hm+m, haa+a.

**4.3.3.** In example 3 (below) the patient has met the doctor and the interpreter before. The doctor and the interpreter however have not met be-

fore. The doctor talks all the time as if she was reading from her papers, which she in fact may be doing (at least in the latter part of the discussion). She literally shoots her message at the target (= patient; receiver), seemingly not aware of any receiver at all and acting as if she were following a formula for doctors' interviews with patients. The patient, although he has come to find out whether he has a serious illness, is very much at ease, jokes and talks a lot, which is not very usual among Finnish patients. This makes the contrast in the situation, between the doctor's formal and the patient's informal, behaviour even more striking.

**Ex. 3.** A discussion between a doctor (D), the patient (P) and the interpreter (I).

D: *Har du vari frisk tidigare i ditt liv?*

HAVE YOU BEEN HEALTHY EARLIER IN YOUR LIFE?

I: *Oletko aikaisemmin elämässäsi ollut terve?*

HAVE YOU EARLIER IN YOUR LIFE BEEN HEALTHY?

P: *Oon mä ollu ihan suht koht terve siis / että normaalia sellasta mitä muillakin ihmisillä, ettei mitään ihmeempää.*

YES I'VE BEEN QUITE RATHER HEALTHY THAT IS / THAT NORMAL THINGS LIKE OTHER PEOPLE HAVE, SO NOTHING MORE UNUSUAL.

I: *Joo ja tycker att ja ha varit förhållandevis frisk / allt sånhär normalt som alla har ha ja haft men inge särskilt*

YES I THINK I HAVE BEEN RELATIVELY HEALTHY / EVERYTHING NORMAL THAT EVERYBODY HAS I HAVE HAD BUT NOTHING SPECIAL.

D: Ja+a

YES.

D: *Ja+a, näe, näe. Röker du?*

YES, NO, NO. DO YOU SMOKE?

I: *Tupakoitko ?*

DO YOU SMOKE?

P: *Hm+m.*

I: *Hm.*

D: *Hur mycke?*

HOW MUCH?

P: *Liikaa, liikaa.*

TOO MUCH, TOO MUCH

I: *Alldeles för mycke.*

FAR TOO MUCH.

P: *(Skrattar) (Laughs)*

D: Hur mycke e de, ha-, två paket?  
HOW MUCH IS THAT, HA-, TWO PACKETS?

I: Kuinka paljon se on, kaks askia?  
HOW MUCH IS THAT, TWO PACKETS?

P: Joskus.  
SOMETIMES.

I: Ja ibland.  
YES SOMETIMES.

D: Mm+m. / Sprit?  
MM+M. / SPIRITS?

I: Entä viina?  
AND WHAT ABOUT SPIRITS?

**4.3.4.** This excerpt is from a court proceedings. It is the second part of a trial that had started two weeks earlier, so all the parts had met before.

**Ex. 4.** Proceedings in court. The parts are the president (P), the accused (A), the interpreter (I).

P: Du kan bara tala om vil- när du fick reda på att hon väntade barn å sen kan du börja å  
YOU CAN JUST TELL US WHICH, WHEN YOU FOUND OUT THAT SHE WAS PREGNANT AND THEN YOU

I: Kerro vaan koska sinä sait tietää että  
JUST TELL US WHEN YOU FOUND OUT THAT

P: berätta va som hände just den här dagen.  
CAN START TELLING US WHAT HAPPENED JUST THIS DAY

I hän odottaa lasta ja sitte kerrot mitä kyseisenä päivänä tapahtui  
SHE IS PREGNANT AND THEN YOU TELL US WHAT HAPPENED THE DAY IN QUESTION.

A Sinä päivänä tapahtui silloin kun hän sai tietää mitä / että hän odottaa lasta?  
HAPPENED THAT DAY WHEN SHE FOUND OUT WHAT / THAT SHE IS PREGNANT?

I: Va som hände under den dan när hon fick veta att hon väntar barn?  
WHAT HAPPENED DURING THE DAY SHE FOUND OUT SHE IS PREGNANT?

P Ne+e, den här dagen som åklagarn påstår att du har misshandlat din fru.  
NO. THIS DAY WHEN THE PROSECUTOR STATES THAT YOU HAVE BATTERED YOUR WIFE

- I: Sinä päivänä kun syyttäjä väittää että sinä olisit  
 THAT DAY WHEN THE PROSECUTOR STATES THAT YOU  
 pahoinpidelly vaimoasi.  
 WOULD HAVE BATTERED YOUR WIFE
- A: Joo / no  
 YES / WELL.
- P De e den som e, vi, vi e intresserade av  
 THAT'S THE ONE THAT IS, WE, WE ARE INTERESTED IN
- I: Se on se mistä me ollaan kiinnostuneita  
 THAT IS THE ONE WE ARE INTERESTED IN.
- P: den trettonde juni nittonhundranittiet  
 THE THIRTEENTH OF JUNE NINETEENHUNDRED AND NINETYONE
- I: kolmastoista kesäkuuta yheksänkymmentäyks.  
 THE THIRTEENTH OF JUNE NINETYONE.

## 5. Theoretical considerations

As mentioned above, one of the objectives of the project is to explore whether the principles or recommendations given by the Swedish National Board of Trade concerning how interpreters should perform their task is an adequate one or not with regard to reality. As stated above, the recommendation is briefly that the interpreter should act as a neutral, in some sense objective, recoder of a message in L1 to a message in L2, equivalent with regard to semantic content. Related to this question is that of formality—informality of the communicative settings in question and the possible discrepancy between what could be expected (in accordance with the ethical rules) and what really happens in this type of (interpreted) conversations. In the discussion below the question concerning degrees of formality will be treated first.

### 5.1. Degrees of formality

The conceptual distinction between formal and informal social action, i. e. how the behaviour of the agents and their language use varies with the situation, has been a recurrent theme in sociology and for a long time also been of current interest within sociolinguistics. It seems as if laymen as well as professionals often judge certain types of communicative settings as more formal than others. The formal settings have been contrasted to conversational interaction: as typical formal settings are regarded such multi-party settings as ceremonies, church services, confe-

rences, debates, parliamentary proceedings and courtroom proceedings. There are many properties that seem to be common to these and that make them different from small scale conversational settings — in identifying actions as 'formal' involves a form of comparative analysis in which a taken for granted knowledge of the organization of conversational interaction serves as the main part of reference. Atkinson & Drew (1979) listed a bunch of features that were typically observed for the multi-party settings mentioned above:

- the frequency and length of pauses within turns and gaps between turns;
- the topics being dealt with,
- the particular categorization of persons, activities, objects and events being selected and used by the speakers,
- the sorts of actions participants are engaged in and
- the relative absence of hesitations, hitches, self-corrections, repair, initiations etc.

The size of the room and numbers of people involved are also indicators of 'formality'.

These criteria taken into consideration a hypothesis about the degree of formality for the settings used in our community interpreting investigation could be formulated as in the following figure:

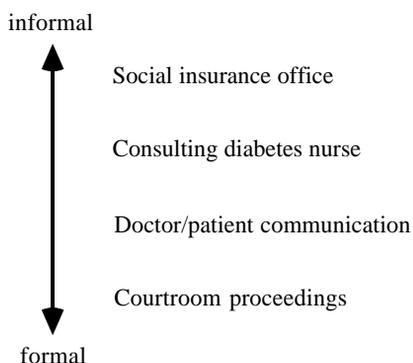


Figure 1. Formality degrees for the various communicative settings used in the FIKON-project.

The most striking exception from the hypothesized relations with regard to degree of formality between the settings occurring in our investigation is the fact that the courtroom proceedings (cf. ex. 4 above) may be very informal and more informal than e. g. a doctor/patient communication. In

addition, the two examples of doctor/patient communication (ex. 2 and 3) are quite different in formality. In sum these examples illustrate the case that formality may vary more within settings than between settings and that the variation between settings may be different relative to what could be assumed, at least from a common sense-point of view about the formality of discourse-types in our society (cf. also Atkinson & Drew 1979). They may also indicate that for interpreted discourse formality may deviate from that of discourse settings without interpretation.

## 5.2. The skopos theory

Also within general translation theory (translation is here used as a general term covering both translating and interpreting) translating was formerly seen as a recoding activity. New approaches focus more on the communicative function of the target language message: translating and interpreting are looked upon from an action theory perspective, where translation is seen as a process involving cultural transfer and as being part of a wider communicative setting. E. g., according to the *skopos* theory (Reiß & Vermeer 1984), the communicative aim is not determined by the needs and the acting of the interpreter only, but is characterized by the interaction of all parts engaged in the process, including the communicative needs of the interlocutors. Translation in this sense has to be characterized as an open-ended, creative process, and the means to reach the communicative goals may vary — preserving linguistic-semantic equivalence in a narrow sense is not the primary aim.<sup>6</sup>

## 6. The community interpreter: a recoder or a creator?

The preliminary observations indicate (cf. also the excerpts presented above) that the skopos theory in its general form is adequate as a tool of analysis for what is going on in communicative settings typical for Finnish/Swedish community interpretation in Sweden.<sup>7</sup> The interpreters do not act as neutral recoders of messages, they omit passages, change the style of the utterings (sometimes even in a more formal direction as compared to that intended by the speaker, cf. ex. 3), shorten the utterances,

<sup>6</sup> The skopos theory seems probable also from a general communicative perspective and from what is known about communicative behaviour in general, from shadowing experiments etc. (cf. e. g. Svane in this volume and elsewhere).

<sup>7</sup> The skopos theory also plays a role in the analysis of data within the SIM-project at our department. The application of the theory was suggested by Helge Niska.

summerize instead of interpreting everything what is said, "forget" to indicate verbal feedback-reactions and make other changes in the text — in short, they do a considerable amount of editing in interpreting.<sup>8</sup> In this respect the interpreters are creative, obviously in a way that is not presupposed in the ethical recommendations and instructions for how interpreters should act. On the other hand, this might be favourable for the communicative outcome as a whole, and it should be remembered that all the interpreters in the investigation are authorized (except one) and very experienced. Apparently the interpreters are to some extent by the agents, especially by the Finnish part, also perceived as mediators and make the Finnish part feel more confident in their communication with the Swedish officials.

Knowing this it could be asked whether the ethical recommendations referred to above are adequate for Finnish/Swedish community interpreting or for community interpreting in Sweden on the whole. Most people involved in community interpreting seem to be of the opinion that there is a need of some kind of recommendations, also in regard to the verbal behaviour of the interpreters. This is most probably right, but, as our investigation indicates, the recommendations should be revised and made more adequate in relation to what is going on in reality. Above all, facts of the kind our investigation, among others, brings forth should be more systematically taken into consideration in the education of interpreters.

## References

- Atkinson, J. Maxwell & Drew (1979): *Order in Court: the organization of verbal interaction in judicial settings*. London: Macmillan.
- Atkinson, J. Maxwell (1982): Understanding formality: the categorization and production of 'formal' interaction. In: *The British Journal of Sociology*. Vol. 33 - nr. 1.
- Englund Dimitrova, B. (1991): *När två samtalar genom en tredje*. Interaktion och icke-verbal kommunikation i medicinska möten med tolk. (= Rapport om tvåspråkighet 7). Stockholm: Center for Research on Bilingualism.
- Englund Dimitrova, B. (forthc.): Omissions in consecutive interpretation: evidence of a decision component. Forthcoming in a volume published by the Department of Slavic and Baltic Languages, Stockholm University, to the memory of professor Anders Sjöberg.
- God tolksed* (1989): Stockholm: Kommerskollegium (Utbildningsförlaget).
- Kulick, D. (1982): Interpretation and discourse. In: Kulick, D. (ed.): *Om tolkning*. (= Praktisk lingvistik, 7, publ. by Institutionen för lingvistik, Lunds universitet), 5-45. Lund.

---

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Wadensjö 1992.

- Linell, P. & Jönsson, L. (1986): *Rätten och invandrarna*. Linköping: Tema Kommunikation.
- Linell, P. & Wadensjö, C. (1989): *Kontakttolkningens kommunikativa spelrum*. Arbetsrapporter 1989:2. Linköping: Tema Kommunikation.
- Lundgren, U. (1993): Finsk-svensk kontakttolkning i Sverige. *VAKKI-symposium XIII*, 131-138. Vasa.
- Lundgren, U., Romppanen, B. & Wande, E. (1993): Ruotsissa tapahtuva suomen ja ruotsin välinen kontaktitulkkaus — taustateoriaa ja nykyinen käytäntö. In: Suojanen, M. & Kulkki-Nieminen, A. (eds.): 19. Kielitieteen päivät, 355-367. 8-9, May 1992. Department of Finnish and General Linguistics, Tampere University.
- Lönnroth, M. & Romppanen, B. (1990): *Handledning för tolkutbildning vid högskola*. Stockholm.
- Niska, H. & Wande, E. (forthc.): Text linguistics, bilingualism and translation — some preliminaries. To be published in Working Papers from the Department of Finnish, Stockholm University. Stockholm.
- Niska, H. (1989): Tolkning. I: Svanberg, I. & Runblom, H. (red.). *Det mångkulturella Sverige*, 430-438. Stockholm.
- Reiß, K. & Vermeer, H. J. (1984): *Grundlegung einer allgemeinen Translationstheorie*. Tübingen.
- Schackman, Jane (1985): *The right to be understood*. Handbook on working with employing and training community interpreters. Cambridge: Cambridge Ext. College.
- Schlesinger, M. (1991): Interpreter Latitude vs. Due Process. Simultaneous and Consecutive Interpretation in Multilingual Trials. In: Tirkkonen-Condit, S. (ed.): *Empirical Research in Translation and Intercultural Studies*, 147-155. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.
- Stroud, C. (1981): Tolkning, tolkutbildning och lingvistik. In: Hyltenstam, K. (ed.): *Språkmöte*, 178-215. Lund.
- Vamling, K. (1982): Experiment med simultantolkning. In: Kulick, D. (ed.): *Om tolkning*, 46-86. Lund.
- Wadensjö, C. (1992): *Interpreting as Interaction*. On dialogue-interpreting in immigration hearings and medical encounters. Linköping: Tema Kommunikation.
- Wande, E. (1990a): Projektet Finsk/svensk kontakttolkning. Projektansökan till Delegationen för invandringsforskning. Finska institutionen, Stockholms universitet.
- Wande, E. (1990b): Textlingvistiska modeller för studium av simultantolkningsprocessen — en pilotundersökning. Projektansökan till HSFR. Finska institutionen, Stockholms universitet.
- Wande, E. et al. (1993): *Interkulturell förståelse och överföring — kognitiva och kontextuella aspekter på tolkning och översättning*. Förslag till insatsområde för Fonden för kulturvetenskaplig forskning. Stockholms universitet: Språkvetenskapliga sektionen.



