INVESTIGATING INTERVENTIONIST INTERPRETING VIA MIKHAIL BAKHTIN

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents assertive queer-feminist strategies in simultaneous interpretation and argues that these are not only feasible but compliant with basic tenets of Structuralism. In particular, I will use three aspects from Mikhail Bakhtin's work: firstly, organic versus intentional language change (hybridity), secondly, the concept of the act as an answerable, participatory action ("postupok"), and thirdly, the idea of a distant addressee with presumed absolute and responsive understanding (the loophole reader). These concepts will be read against work in translation studies on decision processes (Jiri Levy, Justa Holz-Mänttäri, Cecilia Wadensjö). The paper suggests that while translators' decisions are influenced by norms, habitus and other factors, they are autonomous at the moment of action. The call for empowerment becomes a call for responsible agency.

Keywords: Interpreters' agency; interpreting as intervention; queer-feminist interpreting strategies; postupok – heteroglossia – the omniscient reader (Bakhtin)

Interpreting frameworks: guidelines, myths and realities

Interpreting is one of the oldest professions in the world. Guidelines express what was and still is generally perceived as interpreters' tasks. A Finnish resource, for example, says:

> The interpreter's task is to faithfully and accurately interpret the message from one language to another. The interpreter must not give advice, express his or her opinions to the parties of the interpreting situation or voice his or her views on the matter being interpreted. The interpreter's role is solely that of a messenger (Interpretation in the asylum process – guide for interpreters, Refugee Advice Centre, AT-Julkaisutoimisto Oy, Helsinki 2010).

Cecilja Wadensjö renders this typical advice for fledgling interpreters: "translate what is said and translate everything that is said" (Wadensjö 1998: 285). Even the self-percep-

tion of interpreters, be it lay interpreters at the community level or top professionals in high-ranking political settings in the international arena, coincides: they assert that they are mere channels and express their main aim to be to become invisible (Wadensjö 1998; Barnard 2007).

The messenger and conduit model of interpreting is pervasive. However, it is not borne out by reality checks. Sonja Pöllabauer's overview of actual interpreting situations in asylum hearings is revealing in this respect (Pöllabauer 2005: 81ff.).

- Myth: Interpreters convey all that is said. – Reality: Certain statements are voiced and directed at the interpreter but are not meant to be interpreted. These 'internal' remarks may be comments, 'we-discourse', thinking aloud, such as "I don't think she …". Such utterances are not audible to the claimant and are not interpreted. 'External' communication, conversely, takes the form of direct address "When did you …?".
- Myth: Interpreters only relate what is said. – Reality: Whole sequences of the interview may be handed over to the interpreter's care as a summative request: "Ask for the route she took."
- Myth: Interpreters stay faithful to what has been said. – Reality: Breakdowns in communication or dead ends in the hearing result in re-formulations and second attempts, with the interpreters trying to extol a more acceptable answer.
- Myth: Interpreters stay outside to the content of the hearing. – Reality: Interpreters are claimed by both parties as 'their' ally and are thus either seen as not trustworthy by the authorities if they seem to side with the claimant or as hostile and repressive when they do not.

Moreover, interpreting situations are often complex. In asylum hearings, for example, a multitude of agencies are involved and the interpreters are subjected to and torn between various, often conflicting interests. Moira Inghilleri (2007) has mapped the fields of interest:

Asylum Seekers

Relational Fields

Legal Field	Political Field	Educational Field
Geneva Convention	National Sovereignty	Training and Qualification
European Human Rights Law	Foreign Policy	Models of Interpreting
Legal Services Legislation	Immigration Policy	Theories of Language/Culture
Rights to an Interpreter	Representations of Asylum Seekers	
	Interpreter Provision	
	Sites of Interpreting Activity	
	clinical/social service	
	solicitors/legal reps	
	Home Office	
	Immigration Appellate Authority	

Social and Biological Trajectory of Interpreters

Source: Moira Inghilleri (2007)

Interpreting as act, interaction and intervention

We will look at interpreting as an act, as an ongoing interaction and as an essentially interventionist activity.

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                    Act
              ↙            ↘
     Interaction          Intervention
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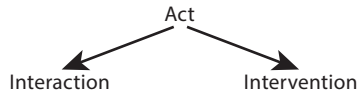
Act

Acts presuppose intention, decision-taking and autonomy (Holz-Mänttäri 1984; Wadensjö 1998). Bakhtin (1993) adds a moral component and conceives of the act as a participatory and intentional deed, which makes every person – including interpreters – answerable in all his or her deeds. The literal meaning of his key term 'postupok' is 'the step taken'. Bakhtin writes:

> Every thought of mine, along with its content, is an act or deed that I perform – my own individually answerable act or deed [postupok]. It is one of all those acts which make up my whole once-occurrent life as an uninterrupted performing of acts [postuplenie]. For my entire life as a whole can be considered as a single complex act or deed that I perform: I act, i.e., perform acts, with my whole life, and every particular act and lived-experience is a constituent moment of my life – of the continuous performing of acts [postuplenie] (Bakhtin 1993: 3).

The concept of every one of us being individually answerable for our deeds is at conflict with the 'messenger' role for interpreters from the guidelines. In fact, the 'channel' metaphor does not only absolve interpreters from all individual responsibility for the content of the message but also admonishes strictly against interfering with the message. So are interpreters exempt from this answerability?

Bakhtin denies this. He maintains that there is a 'non-alibi in Being' for all of us:

> The world in which an act or deed actually proceeds, in which it is actually accomplished, is a unitary and unique world that is experienced concretely: it is a world that is, heard, touched, and thought, a world permeated in its entirety with the emotional-volitional tones of the affirmed validity of values. The unitary uniqueness of this world […] is guaranteed for actuality by the acknowledgment of my unique participation in that world, by my non-alibi in it. The acknowledged participation of mine produces a concrete ought – the ought to realize the whole uniqueness, as the utterly irreplaceable uniqueness of being, in relation to every constituent moment of this being; and that means that my participation transforms every manifestation of myself (feeling, desire, mood, thought) into my own actively answerable deed (Bakhtin 1993: 56–57).

According to Bakhtin, nobody can be exempted from their "unique participation". Hence in interpreting, too, "every manifestation" becomes an "actively answerable deed" of the interpreter as a person. Far from being messengers without a stake in or responsibility for content and wording of the message, interpreters need to fulfil their 'postupok'.

Interaction

Interaction presupposes agency. This calls for acknowledging the interpreters' subjective social embeddedness, possible agenda and personal language use. With the rise of interpreting studies as an academic field the awareness has grown that in interpreting processes the parties interact and that this interaction involves three parties: the two partners in the dialogue and the interpreter (Pöchhacker 1994; Wadensjö 1998). Conceiving of interpreting as interaction and therefore as a social event considers potential but inevitable conflicts of loyalty and affiliation. Disregarding this, asylum hearings, court trials, medicals and political talks rely in their verdicts fully and solely on the words of the interpreters and treat them as indisputable fact.

Intervention

Interpreting is always and inevitably an intervention. For a start, having a third, audible voice in a dialogue manifests an intervention. In addition, prosodic features like gaze, vocal pitch and gestures remind of the interpreter's physical presence.

Moreover, the interventionist nature of interpreting resides in metaphorical uses of 'voice'. The second use of 'voice' refers to the stylistic choices made when either 'replaying' or 'displaying' the writer's tone of voice (Mossop 2007: 23). The last meaning of 'voice' refers to representations of ideological viewpoints (23–24).

For Bakhtin (1981), the presence of several voices in every utterance, heteroglossia, is an inherent feature of all language use because and inevitable in language change. Double-voicing words and expressions makes them assume a different, second meaning which then, over time, becomes common practice. These hybrids are what drives language on: either in an undetectable manner (organic hybrids) or openly (intentional hybrids). Organic hybrids are used naturally without drawing attention, whereas intentional hybrids unsettle, because speakers double-voice available discourses and de-naturalize or ambiguify them (Bakhtin 1981: 360).

This language change through hybridization is subject to two opposed gravitational forces: on the one hand, the desire to keep language constant and unitary and, on the other, hybridization efforts that unsettle and disrupt it:

> Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward.
> Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. […] Every utterance participates in the "unitary language" (in its centripetal forces and tendencies) and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia (the centrifugal, stratifying forces) (Bakhtin 1981: 272).

Interpreters are speaking subjects. They have an audible voice. But they also, and inevitably, have a voice in stylistic terms because as speaking subjects they cannot produce unitary language – as much as they (and their clients) may wish this to be the case. The dialogic nature of language use, which accounts for the evolution in language, makes

intervention unavoidable. But, more importantly, it allows interpreters to use heteroglossia consciously and thus make their acts 'postupki'.
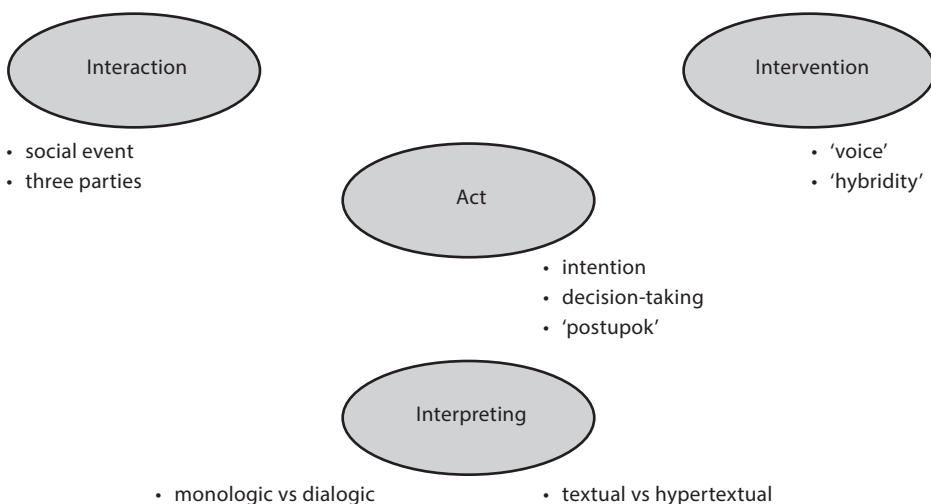
The object of analysis: only text or also hypertext?

A final remark concerns the object of analysis itself. What does the interpreting act actually comprise: the spoken word only, that is the text, or also surrounding features, that is the hypertextual situation?

Interpreting Studies has long vouched for taking hypertextual aspects of concrete interpreting situations, such as preparation, setting, use of media, etc into account. Similar to para- and peritextual analysis in translation studies, it has emphasized how crucial and influential the hypertextual settings and strategies often are (Pöchhacker 1994: 49–62).

Moreover, analysing only text evidence has several drawbacks. To begin with, it disregards all prosodic elements in interpreting, such as gestures or pitch. In addition, it homogenizes and flattens all details and disruptions of the interpreting process – all interaction is presented as if occurring at the same level. But most importantly, analysing transcripts de-personifies language use and shifts responsibility for verbal choices from the subject, the language user, to the object, the language itself (Wadensjö 1998: 44). It is then the language that cannot say it and not the interpreter who forfeits his or her 'postupok'. It is then the language that stays unitary and unchanging and not the interpreter who does not permit its hybridity. The textual analysis of interpreters' acts thus undermines the idea of the 'ought' (what they should do) and glosses over their responsibility and answerability, their 'non-alibi in Being'.

The interpreting framework: key terms in overview

Interaction
- social event
- three parties

Intervention
- 'voice'
- 'hybridity'

Act
- intention
- decision-taking
- 'postupok'

Interpreting
- monologic vs dialogic
- textual vs hypertextual

After the theoretical framework for interpreting outlined above, let us look at the strategies that are really employed in actual interpreting situations at different levels of talks and, secondly, at strategies of intervention that are already being used in other forms of language transfer, that is interventionist translation.

Strategies employed in real-life interpreting

Interpreters at all levels have to deal with different speaking voices, rivalling claims to their loyalty from both parties and linguistic and cultural impasses. They also feel a fundamental responsibility for maintaining the communication. For our purposes, three sources will suffice to have cursory overview of what goes on in actual interpreting settings. The settings come from asylum hearings, medical interviews, court procedures and international talks.

Asylum hearings

Pöllabauer (2005) analysed strategies they resort to in face of such difficulties. Her findings are based on transcripts of some 20 hours of asylum hearings. She identified an astonishing 25 strategic devices that went beyond the messenger role:

> 1. cultural brokering; 2. acting as conciliator and mediator; 3. rhetorical techniques to protect their own authority; 4. conducting additional dialogue with one or the other party; 5. using code switching as an instrument, for instance switching to formal language; 6. negotiating an answer through various ways of asking; 7. assuming the role of the interviewer; 8. uninvited re-phrasing and re-formulating; 9. autonomous coordination of the conversation; 10. acting as a deputy sheriff by commenting on the quality of information offered; 11. additional, self-commissioned efforts to elicit the truth; 12. re-assuring the interviewers; 13. switching interpreting mode (first person to third person); 14. using protocol language to create a distance; 15. giving additional explanation; 16. taking up the role of coordinator or mediator in the case of stalled communication; 17. voicing alignment through register and voice; 18. assuming responsibility for the outcome of the hearing; 19. making meta comments; 20. negotiating relevant information; 21. choosing selective rendition of conversation; 22. filtering lengthy statements; 23. mellowing through politeness and other de-escalation strategies; 24. offering cultural and linguistic explanation in case of misunderstandings (Pöllabauer 2005: 80 ff).

Medical settings

Wadensjö analysed transcripts of medical discourse (Wadensjö 1998: 248–271). Interpreters initiated side exchanges with one or the other primary party (248); they performed pronoun shifts resulting in blurred identification of who is speaking (250); timing and speaking volume interrupted, overrode and stopped narrative discourse or resulted in changed turn-taking (252); they simplified and downplayed discourse (256); they switched to formal and stricter register (256); they switched code through gaze and intonation (258); they used personal pronouns to align with one side (259); they

counteracted anger, impatience and embarrassment through more reserved tone (260); they de-emotionalized discourse (263); they corrected and smoothed out fragmented or ungrammatical discourse (262); they repeated and re-phrased parts of the text (266); they reacted to changes in status and power balance between the two parties (270).

Top-level settings

The last set of strategies comes from interviews with top-level interpreters. Strategies named are: self-initiated eliciting of information ("Less officially, but with permission, his job was to startle, harry and trick the accused into admitting what they had done", The Economist); mellowing and mediating potentially hostile or aggressive discourse (Barnard 2007); choosing to uphold balanced tone and posture in face of tension among interlocutors (Barnard 2007); aligning with one side – voiced frequently and seen as an indication of an interpreter's professionalism and trustworthiness (Barnard 2007); removing oneself physically from the scene (Barnard 2007); refusing to interpret (Barnard 2007; The Economist 2009); reacting upon hypertextual clues like facial expressions, body posture (Barnard 2007); omitting information (Barnard 2007); failing to translate (Barnard 2007); interacting directly with one of the parties (Barnard 2007; The Economist 2009).

These protocols show that interpreters move outside their messenger role at all levels of interpreting settings. They display agency in asylum hearings as well as medical settings, in court trials as well as in the international arena. Their strategies can be grouped into three types.

> First: direct interferences with the text. These include adding or eliminating information.
> Secondly: hypertextual strategies. Examples are side remarks, agreements on interpreting procedures and the use of prosodic features.
> Thirdly: manipulating the conversation. These include all code-switching strategies and affiliation tactics.

These strategies, however, are no 'postupki'. What is missing is the open intentionality of agency and the acknowledgment of individual answerability. The interpreters' agency happens to them, as it were. The paradoxical finding from these readings is that the interpreters are candid about what they did but, at the same time, they insist they are channels and invisible messengers without agency. This is different in examples of openly assertive interventionist translation.

Interventionist strategies in translation

A well-documented area of overtly interventionist strategies is feminist translation. Flotow (1992) described three strategies in Canadian feminist translation: supplementing, footnoting/prefacing and hijacking. In supplementing, the translator "recoups certain losses by intervening in, and supplementing another part of the text" (Flotow 1992: 75). In the second strategy, the translator flaunts his or her presence and agenda in

footnotes and prefaces (77). The 'hijacking' intervention goes even further: the translator uses "every possible translation strategy to make the feminine visible in language" (de Lotbinière-Harwood in Flotow 1992: 79).

Classifying real-life interpreting strategies against categories in interventionist translation

These strategies from feminist translation can be matched against those actually employed by interpreters. Interestingly, even though they may be employed subconsciously or even "occur" against the proclaimed intentions of the interpreters, in the final analysis, they fall into the same categories and amount to the same effect: agency and intervention.

- offering additional information, negotiating interpreting modes – **footnoting/prefacing**
- meta comments – **supplementing**
- code-switching and assuming various roles in the communication – **hijacking**

Interpreters in fact 'hijack' the text when they assume the role of an interrogator in an asylum hearing or court (Pöllabauer 2005; Sonnenfeldt in The Economist 2009) or that of an assistant doctor (Wadensjö 1998) or when they resort to protocol language to de-escalate a situation of growing tension (Barnard 2007). 'Footnoting' occurs in every single instance when interpreters interrupt to give additional information. This is a pervasive practice in the asylum hearings or medical conversations documented by Pöllabauer (2005) and Wadensjö (1998). Similarly, agreements upon modes of interpreting, such as turn-taking procedures and pauses, amount to 'prefacing' (Wadensjö; Pöllabauer). Instances of 'supplementing' are all situations where interpreters explain puns or linguistic intricacies or else try to make up for inevitable loss of information or flavour. When narrative stretches of emotional or ungrammatical language are rendered in a more formal or correct register, the interpreter also hijacks the text: instead of replaying the narrative, she switches 'genre' and maintains 'her' personal/professional agenda. That this is something clients appreciate and expect is illustrated by an example where the interpreter chose to reproduce the ungrammatical language ("translate what is being said" – the court burst out in laughter). Last but not least, guidelines themselves actually encourage 'prefacing' when interpreters are recommended "to inform participants beforehand, and if necessary, remind them during the process" of their strategies (Wadensjö 1998: 241).

Catalogue of simultaneous queer-feminist interpreting strategies

Jo Schmitz in her diploma thesis adopted the assertive strategies from the early Canadian feminist translators for current trends in Gender Studies and simultaneous interpreting. The following catalogue is based on her work.

Three basic propositions should be mentioned in advance:

1. Emphasis on the 'cooperation principle', in which translators and clients are indispensable mutual partners in achieving successful communication (Holz-Mänttäri 1984: 41–43).
2. Emphasis on processes before the commission, organisational dimensions, the venue, the composition of the audience, preparational and post-interpreting revision work, dress code, etc. (Schmitz 2009: 29).
3. The catalogue is explicitly not restricted to gender binaries. Emphasis is on queer-feminist language use, which includes all disadvantaged and de-privileged identities and perspectives.[1]

The catalogue seeks to give discursive visibility to low status groups and disenfranchised people and aims to give a voice to what remains 'unmentioned', i.e. the categories, identities or perspectives omitted from discourse. Key strategies are 'de-hierarchization', 'de-normalization' and 'ambiguification', commonly this is achieved in German, for example, by using the under_score, the ast*erisk or forming new pronoun or person designations. All these strategies comply with Bakhtin's concepts of language change, the dialogic nature of the word and the ultimate understanding through an implied distant reader.

The catalogue uses the categories of 'footnoting/prefacing', 'supplementing' and 'hijacking'.

1. queer-feminist simultaneous **footnoting/prefacing** (Schmitz 2009: 57–59)
   a. marking one's own position (and demarcation from speaker's position)
      i. switching from 1st person to 3rd person to show distance; i.e. from identifying to referencing interpreting
      ii. accompanying such switches by commentary and announcements (to mark it as an intentional act)
      iii. accompanying such switches with changes in gestures, pitch and other paralingual signs
      iv. in whisper interpreting: using eye contact and facial expression to make distance clear
      v. in whisper interpreting: adding information and explanation
      vi. using décalage (time delay) actively to indicate distance to spoken text through prolonged pauses (reminding audience of interpreter's presence/'voice')
   b. hypertextual level
      i. using homepage to inform about one's position and interpreting strategies
      ii. providing links to and examples of inclusive language use

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[1] The language use follows the Hamburg Institute for Queer Feminist Studies: "The Institute for Queer Theory aims at denaturalizing and depriviledging the sex/gender binary and heterosexuality. In accordance with queer approaches it furthermore seeks to challenge normalizations, hierarchies, and relations of domination and violence in all areas of culture and society. It strives to develop forms of acknowledging difference without fixing categories or norms, which in turn are criticized for affirming processes of exclusion or coercive inclusion. Therefore, in a more specific sense, the Institute for Queer Theory fosters the heterogeneity of gendered, sexed and sexual ways of existence, while in a wider sense it proposes the socio-political perspective of a controversial and agonistic pluralism" (Institute for Queer Theory Hamburg, homepage 2013, concept/aim).

     iii. using pre-interpreting contact to inform clients
     iv. using pauses after turns to comment upon, contextualize and clarify positions

2. queer-feminist simultaneous **supplementing** (Schmitz 2009: 53–56)
   a. in cases of interpreting impasses (puns, jokes, neologisms etc.)
     i. remark that there has just been a pun, joke, creative language use etc. that is impossible to translate
     ii. clarifying language use beforehand with speaker (email or telephone)
     iii. switching interpretation mode: from simultaneous to consecutive interpreting example:
      poetry slam video clip during workshop Critical Whiteness: simultaneous whisper interpreting: presenter/moderator of workshop announced beforehand that there would be such a clip and that the interpreter would be given time to translate or explain
   b. in cases of gender-neutralizing, de-normalizing, active ambiguification in the source text (if written text is available beforehand and uses devices like understroke, asterisk, internal capitalization, i.e. German "BinnenI")
     i. supplementing interpretation with handouts, visual aids, slides, etc. (employing cooperation principle with author of source text employing the guttural stop)
     ii. problem in spoken language: guttural stop used both for understroke and internal capitalization (BinnenI), which may result in accidentally "feminizing" – requires pre-interpreting consultation with speaker

3. queer-feminist simultaneous **hijacking** (Schmitz 2009: 59–63)
   a. textual
     i. making subtle linguistic discrimination strategies explicit (confrontational strategy)
     ii. eliminating linguistic discrimination and privileging (corrective strategy) problems:
      a. may gloss over racisms and sexisms
      b. may rob listeners of chance to criticize and notice racisms and sexisms
     iii. using footnoting/prefacing strategies and hijacking in combination: giving first an explanation, then using corrective interpreting strategies) examples:
      a. 'illegal immigration' – 'illegalisierte Einwanderung' (illegalized immigration)
      b. generic masculine
       i. ambiguifying personal pronouns: (generic 'er' in German becomes: 'ihre–seine' – 'sihne–eire' – 'siehne')
       ii. de-privileging: using alternately 'he', 'she' and 'they'
   b. hypertextual
     1. introducing speakers to and urging them to use linguistic alternatives (soft hijacking)
     2. pre-interpreting ambiguifying and de-privileging work on speaker's text
   c. using confrontational hijacking (Schmitz 2009: 61–63)

i.   exposing discriminatory language use by
ii. flaunting silencing and censoring: refusing to translate plus commenting upon reasons
     example:
     insults: interpreter refuses to translate insult, gives explanation that there was insulting language use and that interpreter chooses not to repeat the insult (limits when translating subtly discriminatory texts that work through structural discrimination)
iii. translating discriminatory terms upon first occurrence, subsequently substituting with first letters (plus commenting upon language use)
iv. refusing to accept commission: carefully weighing pros and cons

4. **general considerations** (Schmitz 2009: 63–65)
   i. Who is being talked about? Who is excluded from communication? Who talks to whom? Who has the largest share in the communication? Who can be allies?
   ii. Options:
       1. influencing turn-taking and right of speaking
       2. counter-acting one-sided interruptions and overriding in communication
       3. helping through changes in seating order
       4. discussing with clients in pre-interpreting situations whether and when intervention is wished
       5. changes through sensitizing prior to interpreting
       6. transparent censoring – using only initials, acronyms (plus explanation before, during or right after interpretation)
       7. 'ally' – approach: siding with the weaker party to redress imbalance in power, known from sign interpreting
       8. post-colonial interpreting: giving the 'subaltern' a voice, needs to be discussed with clients beforehand (problematic shifts and ambivalences if interpreter is speaking from a 'white' perspective)
       9. clarifying where loyalties are – who the client is (author of source text, speaker, addressee)

These strategies were mostly developed on the occasion of a workshop on queer-feminist language use in practice. Many of them have been tried out in interpreting situations and found feasible; others are still mere suggestions.

Concluding remarks and outlook

The concepts of answerability and responsibility in interpreting are in conflict with the self-effacing neutrality that is desired and demanded in the guidelines and preserved in interpreters' self-perception. Real-life interpreting protocols and accounts, however, reveal that neutrality is a myth. The strategies that are found to be employed by interpreters from all walks of the profession coincide with the key interventionist moves known from feminist translation. Bringing concepts from Bakhtin's work (the moral conception

of the act as an answerable participatory deed, the tenet of language change through inevitable and ever-present hybridization and the knowledge that communication occurs on the basic assumption that a third distant reader exists who will naturalize the hybrid words) together with what is actually done by interpreters anyway allows us to state that assertive interpreting is possible, warranted and requisite. The catalogue suggested for simultaneous interpreting shows how it may be done.

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