Grasping and Reproducing Topical Episode Boundaries

Re-narration of Dialogue in Multi-turn Interpreting
Elisabeth Poignant

Abstract

In Sweden, numerous public conversations on literature featuring authors from abroad are held each year. Some of those are interpreted for the audience. Interpreting strategies evolve to cope with the formal constraints, as well as the amplification of a staged conversation, which is generated by the contextual setting and culture-interview communicative activity type that is characterised by narrative turns-in-talk. By combining the concepts of topical episode coherence and (re)production format, the analysis in the present paper demonstrates how alternating bilingual updating coincides with narrative development in an interpreter-mediated dialogue, as well as how the interpreter uses variously designed communicative resources to support the moderator and the writer in co-creating the speech event.

Keywords: Topical episode analysis (TEA), multi-turn interpreting, (re)production format.

Introduction

Boundaries can be likened to limits that offer protection, giving a space to move within, or they can be obstacles to be overcome. In human conversation, boundary lines between topics and motives make observable the contours and organisation of thought and interaction. Speakers, reacting to each other’s contributions, together shape and pursue meaning in their communication. For the interpreter, conveying meaning to a third party, the need for the identification of outlines and composition of themes, i.e. an overall awareness of structure and topical boundaries is essential. This seems particularly challenging when the conversation partners – writers, journalists, and literary critics – are professionals in the written (and spoken) word, where to converse in an eloquent and literary manner is made a virtue and art.

Public talks with writers, be they foreign or domestic, have gained increasing popularity in Sweden during the past decade. Earlier, conversations with writers from other countries were limited to a few large official organisers, such as the annual Gothenburg Book Fair or the International Authors’ Scene in Stockholm. These are still the main actors in this field. Nevertheless, every year a growing number of literary festivals and events take place, attracting producers and consumers of fiction for refined entertainment and network opportunities. If not conducted in English, interpretation is used, mostly in the consecutive mode: the interpreter sits on the stage near the writer, serving him/her with chuchotage (whispered interpreting), when Swedish is spoken. Moreover, the writer’s utterances are interpreted into Swedish for the audience.
Communicative activity types

Literary conversations – in terms of question/answer format, professional rhetorical requirements and the special-purpose factors of events – are shaped by the participants and the time and place in which they occur. They can be regarded as institutional conversations in a sense similar to that of public service encounters in medical, legal or educational settings.\(^1\) However, this does not include asymmetrical questioning, where one part completely owns the agenda (e.g. at police hearings or in medical encounters). It lies in the nature of literary conversations that the parties stand on an equal footing, agree on the prerequisites for the subject discussed, and sometimes even engage in joint planning beforehand. Their common goal is to deliver a live portrait of the writer and the piece of literature that is the subject of their dialogue. The discussants appear mutually aligned, supporting each other in their pursuit of a common trajectory when discussing literary and societal issues. The absence of antagonism and the presence of shared aims allow the interpreter to sum up and condense what is said while taking into account the particular demands and ‘entertainment mode’ (Wadensjö 2008:195) of an interview on stage – all for the sake of a smooth progression throughout the event.

As a tool for defining the character of a specific encounter, Linell (2009) combined previous research on communicative genre, discourse type (Marková 2003a) and activity type (Levinson 1992) and developed the concept of communicative activity type. Besides the utterances themselves, this considers types of actions and the specific social and contextual situation as a communicative project (Linell 2009:199-203). By applying this notion to interpreted public conversations, one can state that these communicative projects have generated their own traditions, cultural norms, and specific premises with regard to the speaker time. They offer the writer free scope for contributions, while the scope the moderator is given is somewhat more limited (it is, after all, the writer from abroad people have come to see). The interpreter is allowed time-restricted turns, just enough to maintain the listeners’ comprehension, ideally serving all parties equally, and paying regard to what the shared task of this situation is – to entertain.

A further property of institutional conversations as activity types is the phase structure that divides them into discernible parts. Adelswärd (1995) describes a starting-up phase, followed by diagnosis, decision-making, report, and, finally, round-up phases. Analogically, the type-specific phases of a literary conversation could broadly be defined as a greeting and

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\(^1\) For basic research on institutional conversation, see Agar 1985, Linell 1990 and Adelswärd 1995
presentation phase, a core phase of discussion about the relevant book and the questions it evokes, with an ‘apothecosis’ on the present or a glance at a future work at the end.

**Multi-turns**

Parties frequently react spontaneously in staged literary conversations, and often immediately want to respond to the other’s utterance (when put in the same language) while being unintentionally oblivious to the time slot needed for interpreting. An option for the interpreter is to wait and then bundle, for example, a shorter question and its possibly longer answer together into one interpreting turn, thus rendering two adjacent utterances at once. Indeed, longer sequences with more than two turns by different speakers can also sometimes occur. The excerpt for this study is chosen because it shows a longer monolingual multi-turn passage. The interpretation that follows is the rendition of a whole chain of turns from both participants. In the conversation considered, a total of five similar occasions are found, apart from a number of two turn renderings, which makes monolingual talk-in-turns and multi turn renditions a characteristic of this particular speaker constellation.

**TEA in discourse and interaction analysis**

In the present study, I apply discourse analysis to multi-part speech in transcribed form and define its topical and interactional episodes. The focus is primarily on how topical coherence, in combination with bilingual management, can produce a particular turn pattern where the interpreter rebuilds the episode structure in a doubled version of the other language. As a tool for analysing topic and action progress, I use the TEA (Topical Episode Analysis) method, a means of systematic classification of episodes in conversation. It was first worked out and described in joint articles by Linell and Korolija (Linell & Korolija 1995; Korolija & Linell 1996) and then developed and equipped with a solid taxonomy in Korolija’s dissertation *Episodes in Talk, Constructing Coherence in Multiparty Conversation* (1998). The main idea of the method is to track patterns of coherence within a conversation by categorising ‘chunks’ of discourse and making segments of talk and their interdependencies definable for a coding system, thus mapping these patterns. The rather flexible unit of the episode is the point of departure for evidence of coherence, either locally – between adjacent pairs of utterances (e.g. question–answer) – or globally – between sequences, at episode boundaries or in topical superstructures within conversations (Korolija 1998:240). Hence, episodes are emerging as middle-range units, above the utterance or turn level, but below the larger phase divisions of a conversation (Linell & Korolija 1995; Korolija & Linell 1996).
The episode denotations elicited by Korolija are divided into three sub-categories, using *co-text* (preceding text to a keyword), *situation*, and *background knowledge* as contextual resources for the speakers when moving forward in their topic-sharing and -shaping activity (Korolija 1998:48). Thus, an episode can be invoked by something somebody just said (*co-text*), an object present at that moment or an event that just took place (*situation*), in addition to common ground assumptions, e.g. any predefined, agenda-bound topic belonging to the ongoing activity type (*background knowledge*). Korolija defines seven contextual TEA categories and one non-contextual (unanchored) TEA category (1998:265), summarised here in table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contextual resource</th>
<th>Topical episode categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Co-text</td>
<td>RI – Re-initiation (renewal) of, or return to, a prior non-adjacent episode.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RC – Re-contextualisation of an aspect from a prior episode.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AN – Analogy: new episode analogous to prior episode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation</td>
<td>SO – Reference to an Object present in the Situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SE – Reference to an Event taking place in the Situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(abstract) Background knowledge</td>
<td>AG – Reference to (some aspect of) the abstract activity type: taking up a predefined, agenda-bound topic or sub-activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(none)</td>
<td>BA – Invoking other topics that are situationally close at hand and are assumed to be common ground (belonging to background assumptions).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UA – Contextually unanchored episodes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Definitions of TEA (Topical Episode Analysis) Categories

The main purpose of this study is not to extensively map the episode categories for their own sake, but to see how the interpreter identifies and uses emerging episodes and their boundaries as a means of structuring and coordinating the coming output while trying to avoid time-consuming reiterations of easy-going talk without omitting essentials. “Sense-making consists in the actor’s (or analyst’s) building of coherent links between chunks of discourse […],” states Korolija (1998:143). This gives the ‘chunking’, i.e. segmentation of spoken text, associations as ‘units of sense’, conceived by the early school of conference interpreting in the 1960s in Paris (Lederer 1978), where identifying and processing them is considered a proficiency to be
practised and eventually automatized. In simultaneous interpreting, these sense units are referred to as being on a syntactic level, and their re-wording in the target language is immediate (Pöchhacker 2015:367-368). In the consecutive mode, the challenge for the interpreter lies in analysing ongoing speech for segments of meaning of greater length, taking into account their logical interlinking, with the purpose of capturing and orally reproducing them from notes. This practice, however, is almost exclusively accomplished in monological speeches of predefined coherent rhetoric, intentionally delivered by the speaker. Hence, topical episodes as conversational units, in the sense of Korolija and Linell, differ from the processing-relevant units of the ‘interpretive theory’ notion (Lederer 2015), since they are larger and explored as interactional rather than purely linguistic.

The co-construction of dialogue or multipart conversation brings about its own, unforeseen topic maintenance or topic progression (Korolija 1998:145) with successive transitions, not always distinct in their start or ending. Episodes typically do not end abruptly, nor are new episodes started totally ‘out of the blue’, but initiated by the speakers from some available contextual resource (ibid.:146). The conversations become coherent because the utterances of one participant make sense to another, and the analyst, subsequently investigating the emerging episodes and their boundaries, is able to reconstruct these coherent links and their resulting continuity, basing the analysis of coherence “on the participants’ publicly observable (or scenic) behaviour” (ibid.:239).

The interpreter of public conversations, who is expected to convey this ‘continuity’ to the audience, will, therefore, have to assign him/herself to the role of an ad hoc analyst on stage in order to first deconstruct and then reconstruct the topical coherence. Thus, s/he is on the hunt for the topical episodes recognisable by their boundaries and cohesive links. Moreover, being devoted to the demands of the current activity type, s/he must at the same time manage a) the linguistic task of rendering content and b) the interactional aspect by suitably incorporating the interpreting turn in the ongoing talk flow; in other words, the interpreter must relay and coordinate talk (Wadensjö 1992:69).

Data and transcription

The case examined is a visit by the author Peter Nádas to the town library of Malmö (Sweden) in 2013, as hosted by a literature critic. Nádas’s latest novel, the vast 1,700 page opus Parallel Stories had just been published in Swedish translation. The moderator is Swedish, the author is from Hungary and their common language is German, occasionally still used for international communication among the elder generation of intellectuals in Budapest and several other
Eastern European capitals. Neither the writer nor the moderator speaks German as their first language. The conversation is interwoven with two readings from the translated book, performed by a professional actor from a rostrum. The interpreter, being trained in conference interpreting, is well familiar with staged conversations on literature and culture, and experienced in the consecutive mode, including note-taking and how to render longer stretches of talk in concentrated form.

The data consists of a transcribed video fragment taken just after the first reading. The video was taken by official media staff and simultaneously streamed to other libraries in the region. The file itself was made available for research by the organiser after informed consent by the participants and the owner. For the analysis, a passage was chosen where all three participants on stage were interacting with words in some way. To explain the phenomenon for which I want to give evidence, the total excerpt had to cover about three-and-a-half minutes’ duration and consists of three segments (with an introductory greeting). The first is small talk about an anecdote, the second a recalling of the scene from the book, read aloud just prior to the recount, and the third the interpreter’s condensed rendition of both together.

The transcript follows basic conventions developed for conversation analysis (Sacks et al. 1974\(^2\)), except for the episode and phase boundaries, which are marked in the style of Korolija (1998:14ff). The objects for analysis are the topical episodes occurring in speech and their rendition into Swedish by the interpreter. No multimodal elements are added at this stage of notation (except a body turn at the very end of the excerpt). Yet, para-verbal or vocal features as interactional aspects are included in the analysis. These consist of pauses, volume, speed and pitch movements of voice. Without any claim regarding the phonological completeness of detail, any vocal emphasising or toning down of parts of utterances are registered to signal the primary parties’ performance, on the one hand, and the interpreter’s situated reproduction practices on the other.

In order for the reader to distinguish the language codes, the original source and target languages (German and Swedish) are written in straight type. The English version (author’s translation) provided under each line is purposively more literal than idiomatical to maintain analogous line references in the transcripts and make the episode and sequence structure transparent to the reader. The episodes are lined up as A/I, A/II, A/III, A/IV, B/I and B/II, A and B signifying conversational phases, containing episodes I, II, III, and so on.

\(^2\) A transcript key is found at the end of the article.
Analysis: episode structure

The first noticeable episode boundary in the excerpt occurs between lines 3 and 4. After having expressed anticipation at soon hearing the writer shed light on how he wrote the large volumes of his latest work (line 1-3), the moderator turns directly to the guest, switches over to German (line 4) and bids him welcome. The topical transition between the introduction and the words of greeting, although occurring within one turn of the same speaker, is marked by a change of language code and thus change of address. This moment, it is important to note, also gives a signal to the interpreter to match the language change in the opposite direction: from whispering to the writer in German to taking annotations in Swedish for a later rendering. (One has to bear in mind that this is the starting point of the interpreter’s future turn.) Both episodes (A/I and A/II in the transcript) are strongly oriented towards the agenda-bound activity of starting up a conversation on stage (marked AG).

In the next sequence (line 6-8) the moderator makes a point of being in Malmö and characterises its local inhabitants as having their own view on everything; this is immediately (in a latching turn) backed up by the writer’s exclamatory confirmation. A new episode begins, with an anecdote about the visit of the Soviet cosmonaut Gagarin to Malmö in the 1960s, which invokes common background knowledge and background assumptions (BA), accompanied by short back-ups, yes and laughter from the writer and part of the audience.

Exc., part 1: Introduction and greeting, Malmö inhabitants and Gagarin’s visit (00:00–01:07)

(MO = moderator, WR = writer, IN = interpreter, AU = voices from the audience)

(Background knowledge, AG) ************** A/I **************** (episode boundary; phase boundary)

1 MO: ...och jag hoppas att samtalet ikväll ska ge oss möjlighet att få
... and I hope that the conversation tonight will give us the possibility

2 höra Peter berätta om hur han arbetar när han bygger upp dom här

to hear Peter tell us about how he works when he builds up these

3 monumentala verken som speglar hela förra århundradets historia.
monumental oeuvres which mirror the history of the whole last century.

(Background knowledge, AG, BA) ********************** A/II ****************************************

(episode boundary)

4 .) Lieber Peter!
(. ) Dear Peter!

5 Wir sind sehr froh, dich hier in Malmö begrüssen zu dürfen.

We are very happy to greet you here in Malmö.

6 Öh:: wir, als Malmöer sind (. ) eigentlich dafür bekannt,

Eh:: we, being Malmö-inhabitants (. ) are actually known,

7 dass wir alles was von aussen kommt (. ) Öh::
to look at everything, which comes from outside (.) eh::
mit unseren Masstäben hier in Malmö betrachten.=
with our own measures here in Malmö.=
WR: =Das ist naTÜRlich! (.). Wie willst du das anders HAben?
=Quite natural! (.). How would you have it otherwise!
MO: Nein (.).
No (.).

(Background knowledge, BA) ******************************************

und folglich haben wir (.). als öh: Gagárin
and therefore (.). when eh: Gagárin
aus dem Weltall so (.). zurückgekehrt war=
had returned from space=
WR: =ja
=yes
MO: und öh: auf seiner Tourné über die Welt gefahren ist (.). und auch
and eh: made his tour around the world (.). and even
nach Malmö kam (.). nur festgestellt, dass er ziemlich klein war.
came to Malmö (.). we only noticed, that he had rather a short stature.
AU: haha
MO: (.). und unseren Masstäben von jemand
(.). and according to our standards,
der aus dem [Weltall kommt garnicht (.). öh::
as somebody having been in the cosmos, he seemed not at all (.). eh:::
WR: [hehehe
AU: hihih

When the moderator is about to round up his humorous post and gets slightly stuck in German syntax¹, the writer laughs (line 19), closely followed by (again, only parts of) the audience. He quickly fills in another two short utterances (part 2 below, lines 21, 23) that topically align with the anecdote on Gagarin’s small stature by referring to his own person, and he obviously tries to catch the turn, which again makes a few listeners react with laughter. The moderator immediately matches the writer’s utterance with a contrast, a figure from the novel, which becomes the keyword for playfully moving forward to the main issue: the book (line 25). At this pivotal moment, the conversation starts to tip over, certainly into a new episode, but probably into something more: when the new topic is definitely in place (after line 26), recalling

¹ in line 17 (original version only) projecting, but not fulfilling a dative construction
and re-contextualizing the passage recited by the actor with its personage and its social and historical setting, it proves to belong to a new phase, the main discussion.

Exc. 1, part 2: “in your novel there’s a giant”; “a rather Bourgeois meal” (01:07–02:22)

20 AU: hihih

21 WR: der war ZU klein hh=
       he was TOO small=

22 MO: =er war zu klein
       =he was too small

23 WR: ja, ich bin AUCH zu klein!
       yes, I’m ALSO too small!

24 AU: hahaha

(Cotext, RC) ***************************************** A/IV *****************************************

(episode boundary)

25 MO: Aber in deinem Roman gibt es einen Riesen, einen Arbeiter,
       But in your novel there is a giant, a worker,

26 der fast eine VISION von Schönheit ist.
       who’s almost a VISION of beauty.

27 Ich lenke jetzt zurück zu der angefangenen Szene, die XX1
       I’m now turning back to the started scene, read

28 hier gelesen hat. (.) Wir befinden uns in Berlin, um 1938, und
       here by XX2. (.) We are in Berlin, around 1938, and

29 öhm:: Ottmar Freiherr von der Schuur, der Rassen-
       Ehm:: Ottmar Baron von der Schuur, the race-

30 rassenbiologisches Institut leitet, beobachtet eine Gräfin (.)
       who is head of a racial biological institute, observes a countess (.)

31 und findet sie sehr attraktiv.
       and finds her very attractive.

32 Und jetzt spielen sich sehr viele Sachen ab zwischen den beiden.
       And now a lot of things happen between the two of them.

33 Öhm (.) da wird auch davon gesprochen, wie Emmy Göring
       Ehm (.) there’s talk of how Emmy Göring

34 am Tag davor im Atelier von Arno Breker war.
       the day before had been in the studio of Arno Breker.

35 Da wird sehr viel Geschichtliches hineingetragen.
       There is much of history put into that.

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4 name of the actor, reading passages from the book in Swedish translation

5 — “— “” “” — “” —
But it even appears as a rather Bourgois meal.

Yes, and it’s on the eve of the war.

The boundary itself, between the anecdote on Gagarin in Malmö and the novel as an upcoming topic (lines 24-27), is somewhat blurred or transient. In any case, it is not clearly cut: the naming of the giant, although a tangible opening to the writer’s work, is coupled to the preceding joke on being “of short stature”, and it seems so strongly linked to it that it is disrupted from the ‘real’ topicalisation, namely the novel and its scenario, which comes two lines after and provides evidence for the phase change being under completion in line 27. In fact, the scope of references from line 27 efficiently places the next passage (line 28-36) in the new and core phase of the conversation.

Korolija differentiates the episode category of re-contextualisation (RC) into four sub-categories that are connected to four different links with which a new RC episode can be initiated (Korolija 1998:214). One of them is the occurrence of a ‘leitmotif’, where the new episode builds on supra-episodic structures often labelled by the participants themselves (ibid.:218). This was found fitting in the current episode, as initiated by the moderator: the weight of historical connections, WWII and a mood of growing tension in the scene that was just read all at once steer the conversation into its central subject, the writer’s novel.

In a latching next turn (part 3 below, line 37), the writer is at the point of elaborating the scene and preparing to dive into the events of the dramatic day before the outbreak of the war, which is one of the leitmotifs in his story. A transition from a rather jocular introduction to a serious phase has taken place, with a new mood and a sudden topical drift from local Malmö stories to European history of major dimensions.

Somewhat unexpectedly for the primary parties, the interpreter now comes in between (overlapping the writer) with a request to translate (line 38). A short spot of common laughter shows the participants’ sudden awareness of being so involved in their talking that they had forgotten about the non-German-speaking people in the audience, who were patiently waiting to be included in the lively storytelling on stage and shared knowledge underlying the current laughter. The moderator’s Gagarin anecdote closely concerned the audience itself and naturally ought to be understood by all, but it was not. To repair this seems to be one reason for the interpreter’s intervention. The other motive for the interpreter to break the flow is the episode boundary and upcoming phase transition. Hence, by being responsible for continuously monitoring the language comprehension balance and repealing any loss in understanding, the
The interpreter urgently wants to update. The transition from joking to serious discourse also brings forth a growing problem. If not solved immediately, this will either cause the interpreter to render the playful interaction after the main conversational state has already left it way behind and shifted to a different mood – in which case it will appear irrelevant and even out of place – or leave it out altogether. This would thus deprive the audience of the anecdote about themselves: the reaction of the people in Malmö concerning Gagarin. Regarding the episodic coherence structure, the break-in of the interpreter, which is contextually unanchored (UA), i.e. ‘out of the blue’, brings to the fore the situational context, namely the interpreted conversation as an event (SE) arranged for a non-German-speaking audience. Its agenda-bound procedure at this point makes an interpretation of the accumulated passages overdue.

The last part of the excerpt consists of the interpreter’s rendition of everything said from the code switch (line 4) until the interruption (line 37), and the point of this study is to investigate how the episodes are handled in the interpreting. Naturally, the topical character of an interpreter’s turn is the repetition of previous content per se. Hence, every interpreting turn contributes to the topical coherence only by means of “re-initiation (renewal) of, or return to, [a] prior, non-adjacent topic in the same discourse” (Korolija 1998:230). Still, the interpreter’s turn can appear as an episode with clear boundaries, since it reproduces the contents in an unprecedented and specific way in another language.

The interpreter’s initiative to enter into the conversation is answered by short laughter and a minimal pause, creating space for the interpretation turn with the slowed down “<Alltså>” (“<So>”, line 41). The utterance of this discursive particle here functions as a framing device, indicating ‘thus’, or ‘consequently’, and announcing 1) the beginning of the interpreting turn and 2) a summary of what has been said.

Exc. 1, part 3: “could we just translate this?” (02:22–03:40)

37 WR:  =Ja, und das ist am Vortag [des Krieges.

=Yes, and it’s on the eve of the war.

(Situation, Background knowledge, SE, AG, UA) ******** B/II ********************************************* (episode boundary)

38 IN: [könnt wir kurz übersetz’n jetzt´? eh::

could we just briefly translate this now? eh::

39 AU:  hahaha [hihi

40 WR:  [hehe

(Cotext, RI, AG, BA) **************************** A/II interpreted ******************************* (episode boundary)
12

41 IN: <Alltså>, vi är ju väldigt glada, eh, att Peter Nadasj är HÄR,
     < So >, we are very happy, eh, that Peter Nadash is here,
42 och att vi är här i Malmö.
     and that we are in Malmö.
43 I Malmö, eh, >säjer NN<,
     In Malmö, eh, >says NN<,
44 är vi vana vid att mäta allt med vår egen måttstock.
     we put our own measurement on everything.
45 NATURLIGTVIS! >säjer Peter Nadasj< DET MÅSTE MAN GÖRA!
     OF COURSE! >says Peter Nadash< YOU HAVE TO DO THAT!

(Cotext, RI, BA) **************************** A/III interpreted **************************** (episode boundary)
46 Så till exempel, när Gagarin kom o besökte oss efter att han hade
     So for example, when Gagarin came to visit us after having been
47 flugit ut i <rymden> (.) så la vi bara märke till att han var
     flying out in <space> (. ) we only noticed that he was
48 väldigt kortväxt, "att han va väldigt liten".
     very short, °that he had a very small stature °.
49 Vi tyckte inte att han skulle vara det,
     We thought that he ought not to be like that,
50 °när han hade varit så stor i rymden° .hh
     °having been so big in space ° .hh
51 JA, JAG ÄR OCKSÅ GANSKA LITEN O KORTVÄXT!
     YES, I´M RATHER SHORT AND SMALL IN STATURE TOO!
52 °säjer Peter Nadasj°. ¶ha. (.)
     °says Peter Nadash °. ¶ha. (.)

(Cotext, RI, RC, Leitmotiv) ************************** B/I interpreted ************************** (episode boundary)
53 Men eh: nu ska vi länka över eller gå över till romanen
     But eh: now let us link to or go on to the novel
54 och anknyta till det stycket som lästes upp här.
     and connect to the part just being read aloud.
55 Vi befinner oss alltså i Berlin, år 1938.
     So we are in Berlin, in the year 1938.
56 Rasbiologen von der Schuur,
     The racial biologist von der Schuur,
57 eh, befinner sig i det här huset, han iakttar den här damen,
     eh, is in this house, he observes this lady,

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6 name of the moderator
dom upptäcker varandra, dom brinner för varandra.
they discover each other, they burn for each other.
Här finns det väldigt mycket historia som vävs in,
Here there is very much history interwoven,
men egentligen befinner vi oss i en ganska vanlig
but actually we find ourselves in a rather customary
högborgerlig miljö. ((turns to the writer))
upper-class environment.

(Cotext, RI, RC, Leitmotif) ******** B/II new onset ******* (episode boundary; phase boundary)

In time, the rendering of 2 minutes’ speech is compressed into 1:15 minutes. The episodes A/I (greeting, reference to Malmö inhabitants) and A/II (anecdote on Gagarin), with interjected comments by the writer, are rendered, whereas A/IV (reference to giant) is left out. Other omissions can be noticed in the episode recalling the passage read aloud in Swedish just before. One reason for the omissions can be cognitive overload (Gile 1997), although the moderator’s turn was neither dense in information nor uttered with exceptionally high speed, which is more often a problem in the simultaneous rather than consecutive mode. Another reason could be the interpreter’s deliberate choice to pass by less important details, for the sake of coherence, in favour of progress in the communicative activity going on. In the case of the very short episode, or rather sub-episode, that mentions the giant, the interpreter skips it as transition and goes straight into the new phase, again using a framing device: “Men eh:” (“But eh:”, line 53), indicating contrast, and, like the moderator earlier, announcing a new topic and building coherence by linking to the piece read aloud, thus turning to the novel (line 53-54). Further, the narrative on Berlin in 1938 is condensed to highlighting only two (instead of four) people: the protagonists von der Schuur and ‘the lady’ at the historical feast. As a result of all these micro-decisions, the conversation can rapidly move on toward the leitmotif looming in the writer’s coming turn eagerly expected by the listeners.

The analysis does not imply any assessment of the interpretation as successful or weak in terms of equivalent or accurate rendering in the target language. The study strives to be strictly descriptive and illustrate one case of bilingual conversational management, occurring in the interpreters’ task on stage, for a single, situated occasion. In recollecting the characteristics of the interpreted passage, it discloses a transformation of the episode structure by quotations, rewordings, summaries and omissions. A compilation of the topical episodes as they occur, first in the original and then in the interpretation, results in the following scheme, which also shows the opening and closing of the interpreted turn between the writer’s onset attempt (line 37), and
then the preparation for the real (new) onset (line 61). Time records refer to the boldly marked fields.

The topical episode structure is basically maintained from the SL to the TL, whereas the episodes are internally contracted, and the transitional sub-episode A/IV is cut short.

Table 2: Topical episode structure transformation from SL to TL version

For an additional and closer analysis of the rendition itself, I suggest the concepts of participation structure and production formats and their applicability concerning interpreter practices, which are in this case embedded in and governed by the activity type of staged literary conversations.

Participation structure of episodes and (re)production format

Korolija looks at topic progression and participation structure as two important dimensions of coherence in spoken interaction (Korolija 1998:180). She also combines TEA categories with a concept that distinguishes participant roles within episodes, enabling the analyst to capture
the interactional dynamics between the members of the group (Korolija 1998:166ff). Adopting a version of role categories developed by Ochs & Taylor (1992) for the analysis of dialogically co-constructed narratives in conversation, Korolija defines the *initiator* as the one who triggers talk on a topic, the *main speaker* as the most active during an episode, the *main addressee* as the single most often addressed and the *main figure* as the one being discussed, sometimes identical to the *main speaker* or the *main addressee* (ibid.:167).

Motivated by the fact that interpreting brings with it new angles of situated social refraction on stage and a ‘replaying’ of the other interlocutors (Wadensjö 1992:259ff), I also link it to the concept of roles and footing within the participation framework. This was launched at an early stage by Goffman (1981) and extended to interpreting by Levinson (1988) and Edmondson (1986). It was also applied to the dynamics of interaction within dialogue-interpreted encounters by Wadensjö (1992, 1998, 2008) and Straniero Sergio (1999, 2013). After briefly recalling some outlines, I will examine Korolija’s participation structure in this light, and how it is manifested within the interpreter’s turn.

Goffman (1981) defines the speaker role as containing different aspects of self in terms of interaction modes within a threefold *speech production format*. These include: ‘sound producing’ *animator*, reformulating *author*, and as for his/her utterances, fully responsible *principal*. Wadensjö develops from the Goffmanian model a set of complementary notions, such as *reception format*, which matches and functionally completes the production format. This is then applied to the interpreter as a *reporter* – one who is only responsible for the uptake of the message; a *recapitulator* – someone who gets the message and prepares to pass it on; or a *responder* – someone who contributes to the content of the conversation. This distribution of responsibility by means of the various speaker and listener formats defines the interpreter’s activity as one of *reporter* and *recapitulator* in preparatory up-take listening and correspondingly as *animator* or *author* when speaking as a language mediator. The interpreter thus undergoes continuous postural shifts or takes different ‘footings’ (Goffman 1981). The *principal* or *responder* is not completely self-evident as a potential role position of the language mediator in conversations, which is the reason why the interpreter in some respects appears as a ‘non-person’ (Wadensjö 1998:66-67). The occasions when the interpreter adopts the footing of a *principal* or *responder* are when the language-mediating situation requires explicit coordination before the conversation can continue (Wadensjö 1998:93).

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7 Ochs & Taylor’s (1992) role distinctions are *introducer, primary recipient, protagonist, problematiser* and *problematiser.*
In verbatim interpreted speech, as in line 44 (the moderator), 45 and 51 (Peter Nádas), the interpreter distinguishes herself as an *animator* of what is not her own but the others’ talk. Obviously, as the interpreter expresses the other’s talk in a new language, a certain *authorship* can potentially always be experienced in *her* talk, and the lack of mutual accessibility characterising interpreter-mediated talk implies that the ownership of talk can always remain obscure (Wadensjö 2015: 299). However, when the interpreter gives short accounts on source attribution (who is speaking), an independently coordinating third *principal-responder* role shines through in these clarifying micro-comments, enclosed within or just after animated reported turns. The sudden intermission of the interpreter (line 38) recalling the agenda of the bilingual update, as well as the body movement closing the interpreted turn (line 61), are acts of explicit coordination and thus principal-ship.

Returning to Korolija’s participation structure within episodes, and applying them to the excerpt, the initiator, as well as the main speaker role in all SL episodes, are embodied by the moderator, and the writer is the main addressee and the main figure, with his work growing more and more central in the discussion. In their interaction, the two are oriented toward each other, and the writer (after several attempts to take the turn) prepares his first substantial turn as the main speaker in line 37. When the interpreter decisively takes the initiative to enter the conversation, and delivers the preceding episodes packaged into one interpreting turn in the other language, the moderator and writer change into pure listeners. The audience turns into the main addressee, spoken to by the interpreter, who is now the main speaker who reports and re-narrates the various contributions. At this moment, the interpreter is ultimately serving the people in the audience by scaffolding some or filling out for others in their comprehension of what they shortly before had perceived on stage but not fully understood. In this way, the interpreter takes an active initiator role of strong authorship rather than ‘echoing’ animator-ship to match the lively conversation with a lively rendering of its content.

**Enhanced para-verbal markers: role-modelling by intonation**

Irrespective of the case of interpreting, Korolija states that speakers often start a new episode at a different prosodic level regarding intonation, loudness, speech rate, etc. (Korolija 1998:211). In the first part of the excerpt, this manifests itself, for example, between lines 3 and 4, when the moderator turns to the writer and switches over to German in a new ‘tone’ “Lieber Peter!” (“Dear Peter!”). The same happens in line 27, where he makes a fresh effort and turns to a new (re-contextualizing) topic “Ich lenke jetzt zurück zu der angefangenen Szene...” (“I’m now turning back to the started scene, ...”).

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The interpreter, in rendering the anecdote, uses voice modulation to allow speaker and topic changes to stand out. The speeding up of the short accounts “>säjer NN<” (“>says NN<”, line 43), as well as the emphasis through loudness put in the replay of the writer’s back-channelling interjections, are particularly directed towards facilitating the listeners’ uptake and helping them confer what they had heard and seen earlier to what they now understand. A short sound sample (fig. 1) from lines 50-52 illustrates the change in intonation when the interpreter a) reformulates the moderator’s words at the end of the anecdote, b) reports the writer’s comment with a sudden rise in voice, and, c) with a now lowered voice, briefly adds the speaker’s attribution.

Although the episodes in themselves are summed up, the topical boundaries in the interpreter’s rendition follow the same pattern as the original. The interpreter marks a boundary by e.g. changing from exclamatory to a lower intonation (line 45-46), or by a significant exhalation and a minimal pause (line 52) before a new onset, when the originally gradual episode change is decidedly abridged into a non-gradual, clear-cut boundary by jumping over the giant motive (line 52-53).

The strategy of voice and tenor modelling might, in fact, imply nothing more than a storytelling technique, a proficiency normally associated with (staged) speech performance. In addition, Korolija (1998:167) even suggests categories for topical analyses, which involve topic types of e.g. narrative, argumentative, confrontative, etc., episodes. In the current data, by means of a (moderately) dramatised narrative intonation, the three topical episodes of greeting, anecdote, and introduction to the book are remoulded and retold by the interpreter in a polyphony of several parallel voice-lines. These report the main speaker and the main addressee of the event on the stage to the ‘superior’ main collective addressee – the audience. Submitted under the demand of brevity, in order to avoid taking away speaker time from the main interlocutors, the interpreted turn still provides more or less the same substance of what the interlocutors said.

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Fig.1: Soundtrack fragment of lines 50-52, exc. 1 part 3

\[\text{Analysed with the software of Audacity, volume (decibel) only.}\]
Discussion and conclusion

The present case of interpreter-mediated talk has shown some of the ways in which an interpreter of literary conversations manages the rendition of topical development from a supra-utterance level. Moreover, mostly in the role format of the reformulating author–recapitulator, the interpreter chisels out and enacts the main narrative and interactional line in as short a time as possible, avoiding taking up a great deal of space. The literal fidelity to the original, therefore, has to step down in favour of loyalty toward the specific communicative activity type involved: a conversation on stage, entertaining an audience that is mainly waiting for the writer from abroad to speak. This audience may also be partially able to understand the original language and thus regard the interpretation as support rather than something on which they are literally dependent. Hence, for the interpreter, this particular activity type is afflicted with the call not to deliver long elaborated turns, but to fit in preferably quick and elegant renderings of the substantial topical and interactional movements that just occurred.

Recomposing several adjacency pairs, and replaying, re-acting and re-narrating the conversation, the interpreter’s turn is like a reduced edition or ‘miniature’ of the preceding episode suite. In this way, as if it were an underlying voice, running parallel to the actual event, and revoking content for deepened understanding, the interpreting is incorporated into the dialogical course of the conversation. For its successful accomplishment, summaries, selective omissions as well as vivid enactments are used as deliberate strategies to move forward, keep the audience on track and maintain their interest. Thus, following the intrinsic requirements of the activity type, the interpreter’s techniques and practices in this particular case are not governed primarily by the question of accuracy, equivalence, and full completeness, but become subordinate to rules imposed on them by the situation within which they occur.

Unquestionably, in a bilingual interpreter-mediated conversation, mutual communication surfaces between the parties are more complicated than in a monolingual one. The inevitable consequence of bilingual arrangements is the entrance into the conversation of yet another speaking party who in the eyes of the others has an often vaguely defined role. This necessarily leads to an increased amount of turns and additional refractions of the interactional movement and speech flow. Increasing the number of people on stage from two to three makes the possible number of footings grow exponentially, analogous to the rise of the combined dyads or triads of speakers and addressees it implies, the audience included. It can be argued that the lack or vagueness of principal-ship in the interpreter’s participation status, which leads to the image of a non-person in specific activity types, is outweighed by a reciprocal image of the interpreter
as an (indeed likewise vague) ‘all-person’ who performs multiple footings to accomplish the language-mediating task at hand.

Within the challenging norms of staged conversation, the active grasping and reproduction of boundaries, and topical ‘signposts’ of episodes, enables interpreters to de- and reconstruct the coherence of speech as it progresses. Taking a foothold above the word and utterance level, they ‘dress in the winged footwear’ of their patron Hermes – the protector of boundaries, roads and travellers, as well as of literature and poetry – and remodel these boundaries in a swift mode, being carried by the communicative activity type of oratory and wit in public literary conversations. Still, to eschew any precipitant and far-reaching inferences, further research on interpreter-mediated literary conversations would be desirable.

Transcription key:

******* (epis. bound.) episode boundary (start of a new episode)
**** (phase bound.) phase boundary (start of a new phase)
[   ] overlapping speech
= latching speech (no pause between two speakers)
, temporary rise or fall in intonation
. final intonation
( ) micro-pause (no longer than 0.5 sec.)
>säger han< higher speed than surrounding speech
<rymden> lower speed than surrounding speech
KORTVÄXT louder voice (increased volume)
*eller* silent voice (reduced volume)
↑ ↓ rising or falling tone (pitch)
.hh breathing in
ha/hi/he breathing out/laughter
: prolongation (of vowels)
{(turns to WR)} gestures, glances
References


