



Interpreters from the past:

Research methodologies in the history of interpreting

It has been argued that research on the history of interpreting as a social practice has been quite limited due to the lack and volatility of oral sources (including recordings of interpreters' performances). Interpreters are, by definition, secondary characters in historical events, so their (usually only oral) presence is difficult to track in the continuum of historical events. These circumstances may also explain why, with few exceptions, language mediators have not been considered a research topic for cultural history so far.

However, in the past two decades or so, the interest in the history of interpreting, as a subdiscipline within Interpreting Studies, has experienced a remarkable increase. A certain understanding of the challenges faced by interpreters in the past may contribute significantly to respond to multilingual communication demands in a globalized world, where migration and conflict are current issues of particular importance.

A thorough analysis of historical occurrences of language mediation requires appropriate methodological tools. In my talk, I intend to address research matters from different geographical areas and various historical periods. I will show examples of published research as well as research in progress, carried out according to methodological approaches which are based on two essential pillars: interdisciplinarity and the combination of primary and secondary sources. That is, in my view, the optimum way to circumvent difficulties derived from the scarcity of records.

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