Veerle Duflou. Be(com)ing a conference interpreter: An ethnography of EU interpreters as a professional community. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2016. 392 pp. ISBN 978-90-272-5870-0. Reviewed by Claudio Bendazzoli (University of Turin)

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Veerle Duflou. *Be(com)ing a conference interpreter: An ethnography of EU interpreters as a professional community*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2016. 392 pp. ISBN 978-90-272-5870-0.

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The institutions of the European Union, particularly the European Parliament and the European Commission, represent a unique setting where translational activities are performed on a broad scale, on a regular basis and with the widest-ranging language regimes ever devised. The professionals involved are selected according to the highest standards, and the principle of transparency underpinning the functioning of these institutions makes it easier to have access to (and permission to use) the data produced in such an environment than in many others. This is borne out by the growing body of research which analyzes the output of EU interpreters, including corpus-based projects.

The volume reviewed here presents a fascinating study of EU interpreters, drawing data from three main sources: fieldwork observation of simultaneous interpreters at work; informal and in-depth interviews; and a corpus of texts (documents, books, web pages) that are particularly relevant to the community of practice under consideration. Interestingly, the focus is not on interpreters' linguistic output but on their behavior, especially *before* the mike goes on, and includes their nonverbal practices while they are actually interpreting. In particular, the learning process of newcomers is investigated with a view to shedding light on what situated learning means in this context – in other words, trying to better understand the practical knowledge acquisition that accompanies the progression from the interpreter's initial testing and accreditation (marking the completion of their formal education as a conference interpreter) to the achievement of full professional maturity within the constellation of EU meetings. Besides providing a highly informative account of how interpreting services are managed and organized by the two bodies responsible for providing them (i.e., DG INTE and DG SCIC), this ethnography is a real eye-opener on many aspects of EU interpreting that are likely to be taken for granted by experts in the field, be they practitioners or researchers (or both).

The author of this study epitomizes the category of researcher that has come to be known as a "practisearcher" (Gile 1994): Veerle Duflou is a professional conference interpreter working for EU institutions, as well as an interpreter trainer and an interpreting scholar with an academic affiliation. Given that she was "already familiar with many of the back-stage activities that might not be understood or observed by analysts from other communities of practice" (Bendazzoli 2016: 13), this surely afforded her distinct advantages in terms of accessing and collecting data (with some notable exceptions: for example, DG INTE did not grant permission to publish texts, whereas DG SCIC did). This practisearcher's role, however, was not just that of a mere participant observer leveraging her ingroup membership of the target population; rather, Duflou acted as an observant participant (p. 23), in that she applied research methods (especially ethnographic ones such as interviews, text and discourse analysis, narrative analysis and multimodal analysis) to systematic observations, including her own day-to-day experience while interacting with other members of the same community (in this case, the Dutch booth). Such a view from within may raise some skepticism, with concern about whether the researcher was too closely involved with the object of her research. Yet there is convincing evidence of the various ways in which she has distanced herself and striven to address the limitations entailed in this methodology by making her "presence and position as a researcher explicit" (p. 76), taking a critical look at reflexivity, and sharing with the reader the major unexpected twists in the development of her research plan and design of research questions.

The volume comprises an executive summary and eight chapters, grouped into three main sections: Introduction (chapters 1 and 2); Findings (chapters 3 to 7); and Concluding discussion (chapter 8). Chapters 1 to 6 are each preceded by a vignette, an original and creative way to introduce the reader to the main themes presented in the body of the chapter. The content of these vignettes ranges from visual items (e.g., pictures of various locations in EU institutions, maps and data graphics) to written texts such as the author's research logbook, excerpts of interviews, and field notes. Further visual content is provided in some chapters, in the form of snapshots of documents or screenshots (unfortunately a bit blurred, and thus not so reader-friendly). At the end of the book, the appendix includes 12 annexes, mostly observational fieldwork excerpts. As well as supplementing the presentation and discussion of the data throughout the volume, the tables and data sheets used in the author's fieldwork are useful materials that may be used as templates by other researchers.

The two chapters in the first section present the research questions, explaining how and why these were formulated, and introduce the main theoretical notions framing this study. Emphasis is put on the link between a practice and the context in which it is performed, thus taking a broader stance compared to previous, mostly product- or process-oriented research. The notion of "community of practice" (referring to EU interpreters) is foregrounded, but there also emerges a community of speakers (with reference to active participants in EU meetings, as they come to be known for their institutional roles, speaking style, language preference and so on), who adjust their communicative behavior depending on the kind of meeting concerned. Moreover, the main features of fieldwork and the ethnographic approach adopted are thoroughly presented, with special attention to the (dis)advantages of being an observant participant: on the one hand, the author was able to take advantage of her invisibility as a researcher and easily engage with the community she wanted to study; on the other hand, she had to face issues linked to a possibly conflictual role in the researcher's positioning. There are extremely detailed descriptions of her approach to recruiting informants (who are actually referred to as colleagues in the study), annotating and classifying data, organizing interviews, performing field observations and so on. While this quest for transparency may seem somewhat excessive at times, all the explanations of how to overcome methodological obstacles, such as dealing with preconceptions, and even the reports on incidents which occurred during data collection (see, for instance, the negative effect of the transcription format on the availability of one interviewee, p. 64) offer valuable and interesting information which is seldom disclosed by scholars.

In chapters 3 to 7, the findings are presented and discussed. Chapter 3 gives a historical overview of EU interpreting services and highlights their distinguishing features. The organizational differences between DG INTE and DG SCIC are pointed out, taking into account the effects of successive EU enlargements, and thus of the increasing number of working languages, as well as multilingualism, the ICT tools used to assign jobs and send information to the interpreters (who can be staff interpreters or ACIs – i.e., auxiliary conference interpreters), quality management, the use of *retour* and relay. Besides being highly informative, especially for those not familiar with EU settings, this chapter offers useful insight into "how this framework creates limitations and affordances for their [the interpreters'] practice" (p. 124). Chapter 4 continues the description of how various practical questions are managed by the two bodies in charge of interpreting services, but also zooms in on new members of the professional community ("beginners, newcomers, new colleagues, young colleagues", p. 130). It gives an account of the different criteria used to conceptualize 'beginnerdom' (e.g., remuneration levels, number of working days, language portfolio) and shows how these and other parameters (e.g., professional domicile) are applied differently – and not necessarily in a consistent way – to assign jobs or allocate mentoring programs.

Chapter 5 is a meaty chapter on the major challenges awaiting newly accredited EU interpreters in their transition from formal training to situated learning. These challenges are

varied: they include teamwork (not so common in interpreter education), working long hours, finding the conference room and where booths are located within the maze of EU institutions, scanning relevant information in the wealth of documents available for preparation, the wide range of subjects, terminology, familiarity (or lack thereof) with standard proceedings of EU meetings, proper names of delegates and their political affiliation, and overlapping speech during debates. While many of these issues can also be relevant to simultaneous interpreting practice in settings other than EU institutions (e.g., private markets or other international organizations), there are at least two unique features that make the chapter particularly relevant to EU interpreters: the (incredibly) large scope of possible language regimes (with obvious consequences for floor management, *retour* and relay interpreting) and the routinized use of interpreter-mediated communication (despite the spread of English as a lingua franca) – hence the rationale for "adopting ways of acting which are considered appropriate and belong to the shared professional repertoire of their community of practice" (p. 186). What this shared repertoire consists of is largely explained in the second part of this chapter, and in the two following chapters. These are supplemented with many interview excerpts, especially in chapter 5 – perhaps at times unnecessarily so, and with the risk of turning this part of the study into a long list of anecdotes.

Chapters 6 and 7 look at how turns are managed in the booth, and why turn management is one the most critical problem areas for inexperienced EU interpreters. By comparing discourse *on* practice with discourse *in* practice, the author aptly describes the salient features of turn management habits (e.g., working vertical or horizontal half hours), highlighting how flexible these can be and singling out the main principles behind such flexibility (e.g., relay avoidance, workload distribution, indivisible units of speech, language combination, and the chair's language). Seven EU meetings are scrutinized through observant participation and multimodal analysis: the data are presented in tables, indicating details of time, action in the meeting room, off-/on-mike action in the Dutch booth, and interpreters' turns. Though no English glosses are given for the Dutch interpreters' off-mike verbal (inter)action, which limits access to its content for non-Dutch readers, these tables, together with the schematic overviews, are particularly helpful to emphasize what distinguishes turn management in EU settings from other conference interpreting assignments where such large language regimes are not equally common.

After a wealth of intriguing observations, the reader reaches the last part of the volume (chapter 8) eager to find new guidelines, checklists, dos and don'ts, integrations to curricula in formal education, or adjustments to exam design as a result of the analyses carried out in the various chapters of the book. These are provided only in part, as the author concludes by saying that in her view "it is more productive to provide an ethnographic prism for practitioners to look through, offer food for thought and spark new ideas, than to formulate guidelines for them to follow" (p. 321). Fair enough. For the practisearcher who reviewed this book, Duflou's prism has worked successfully. The more quantitative-minded may frown at the in-depth discussion focusing on specific instances of booth behavior, individuals' accounts, and sometimes isolated examples mentioned in the quoted interviews. Obviously, the results are not treated as general trends. This qualitative and descriptive study is an ethnography, 'limited' to a group of Dutch booth interpreters, with the English and Polish booths considered as comparative cases. In fact, some interesting differences emerge, showing that there is no shared standard in what is learnt by doing. Are differences in behavior and practices possibly related to cultural factors? To what extent do interpreters in different booths receive standardized guidelines or instructions on how to handle certain situations or accompany newcomers through situated learning? Are different practices language-related? Would it be feasible and useful to design uniform protocols for all the booths?

Given the differences already apparent between DG SCIC and DG INTE in the way newly accredited interpreters are assigned to meetings, and the variations in working time management in the booth reported by Polish booth interpreters in this study, an attempt to answer these questions would be highly desirable. Let us hope that other practisearchers will embark on fieldwork and observant participation, following Duflou's fine and compelling approach to the lived experience of EU interpreters, to whom deep gratitude must be expressed for their collaboration and willingness to reveal their professional selves with a human touch.

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