

Are we there yet? Taking stock of where we are and where we are heading

Jill Blewett Memorial Lecture

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Distinguished guests, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Darug people - the traditional custodians of this land, and paying my respects to the elders, both past and present, and to other indigenous guests in attendance. I would also like to thank AUSIT for inviting me to speak at this very important event, in memory of the late Jill Blewett, one of the great pioneers of interpreting and translation in Australia. Unfortunately, I did not have the privilege of knowing Jill personally, but I know that she was passionate about interpreting and translation education, and about the crucial role it plays in raising the standards of the profession. As many of you would know, that is a passion I share, and I feel indebted to Jill for being one of the key people who set the foundations for the wonderful legacy that continues today.

I would also like to pay tribute to the other pioneers of interpreting and translation in Australia, whose trajectories have also influenced mine. I refer in particular to people like Adolfo Gentile, Stuart Campbell, Uldis Ozolins, Terry Chesher, Barbara McGilvray, Luciano Ginori, Ezio Scimone – to name a few – who were there from the very beginning of my own trajectory, when I started in this field

in 1985 as an undergraduate student of the first cohort of the newly established Bachelor of Arts in Interpreting and Translation at the old Macarthur Institute of Advanced Education (MIHE). This was one of the many degrees around the country which were the result of the tireless work of Jill Blewett and others who advocated for formal education for interpreters and translators.

In 2008, when Adolfo Gentile gave the Jill Blewett lecture, he asked the question: “How can we commemorate Jill Blewett?” His reply was:

“Activities such as this and the publication of her papers are certainly an important way of achieving this. However, I believe that the most effective way of commemorating her work is to carry it on, to pursue with the same determination and clarity of purpose the goals which will enhance our profession, not for the profession itself but for the objectives and the clients which it serves” (Gentile, 2008:2).

Today I will talk about how Jill’s work was carried on by presenting the many positive aspects of interpreting and translation in Australia.

The title of my presentation uses the first person plural pronoun ‘we’, because I have been intimately connected with Interpreting and Translation interpreting and translation since I arrived in Australia in 1979. Although I am not in the habit of making my presentations personal, and I feel somewhat apprehensive about it, I will make an exception for this one. I hope you will not find this too self-indulgent, but I felt it was appropriate in order to present an overview of the developments of interpreting and translation as a profession, and as an academic discipline, through the eyes of someone who has experienced many of the facets associated with it.

I also hope that Jill would have been pleased to hear what has been achieved since her passing. So, as I relate my experience as a non-English-speaking migrant, an ad-hoc interpreter, an interpreting/translation student, a professional interpreter/translator, educator and researcher, I will highlight the areas in which we have made progress in the past 25 years (or more). I will then review where we may have gone wrong, where we are now and what may lie ahead.

My first link to interpreting and translation goes back to when I was a 10-year-old girl in Argentina. For reasons I cannot explain, I remember playing with my cousin and pretending that I was an “English interpreter”. My cousin would speak in Spanish and I would pretend to interpret into English. At that stage I couldn’t speak English at all, I didn’t know I would be living in Australia and least of all that I would become an interpreter!

At the age of 12, I migrated to Australia with my parents, who had no knowledge of English. They, like many others we now criticise, had no appreciation of the complexities of language and naively believed that learning English would be easy, expecting to become fluent speakers in no more than about six months. How wrong they were! For me, starting high school in a new country, in a language I did not understand or speak, was not easy, but it was an experience that strengthened my character. I am sure many of you would have gone through the same experiences, so as I speak about my life, I’m sure I’ll also be reflecting many of yours.

I remember being ridiculed by the other students for not speaking the language. They naturally thought I was stupid because I couldn’t express myself. That made me determined to succeed, and thanks to the support of some

great English teachers, I managed to come in the top ten per cent of the state for English in my Higher School Certificate.

Being the youngest in the family, I was the first to acquire fluency in English, and like many other migrant children, I at times became an 'ad hoc' interpreter for my parents and friends.

I will stop here to highlight two areas in which we have made progress:

1. Australia as a nation has changed its attitude towards people from different backgrounds who speak languages other than English. Although some may not agree, I can see this dramatic change in my children's schools where, due to the multicultural school populations, children do not perceive differences based on country of origin.
2. It is uncommon, at least in government departments in Sydney, to have children acting as ad-hoc interpreters

In my search for a university course at the end of year 12, I attended an information session, where Dr Estela Valverde from the MIHE (now the University of Western Sydney) was distributing brochures about the new Bachelor of Arts in Interpreting and Translation (I&T). As soon as I read the brochure, I knew that was the path I was to take, and although I was accepted for a number of courses at different universities, I chose the Macarthur Institute of Higher Education where the only BA (I&T) in NSW was being offered. I thank Estela for being there at that time.

The 1980s were exciting times for interpreting and translation in Australia. The National Accreditation

Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) had been founded only a few years earlier, in 1977; NAATI approved bachelor degrees that were being established around the country; and in 1987 the national professional association (AUSIT) was inaugurated, and I became a founding member.

There was much optimism about the future of interpreting and translation among academics, but I also remember much resentment from the practising interpreters and translators of the time towards the new graduates from the BA (I&T) course. I remember comments such as *“Why would you want to study to become an interpreter? I didn’t have to study! You wasted three years”* or *“Why didn’t you choose something else? There is no future for you in this field”* or *“There isn’t enough work for more”*. I of course did not agree with those comments, and having learned to defy pessimistic predictions in high school, I was determined to do the same in my career as an Interpreter and Translator.

I will stop here again to highlight further developments:

3. Twenty-five years later, the negative attitude towards education is no longer prevalent, as more practitioners graduate from formal courses or come from overseas with interpreting and translation qualifications. In the recent national survey we conducted as part of the NAATI review, 78% of practitioners believed there should be compulsory training prior to accreditation (Hale, 2012).

Although the training I received in my undergraduate degree course was of a high standard, most of the educators were not trained in interpreting and translation themselves and only a few practised in the field. When I completed my undergraduate degree in interpreting and

translation there were no postgraduate degrees offered in the field. I therefore went back to Argentina to pursue further studies in translation, and on my return completed a Master of Applied Linguistics at Macquarie University. I was subsequently invited to teach as a casual tutor in the program at UWS. This motivated me to undertake studies in education, and so I obtained a teaching qualification in community languages, as that was the most relevant language-related education award available at the time.

I will highlight two more advances:

4. Proliferation of NAATI-approved courses – although there is now only one surviving BA I&T course in Australia, at UWS, which is unfortunate, there are many TAFE diplomas and advanced diplomas, and university graduate certificates, graduate diplomas, Masters' degrees and PhDs in I&T around the country.
5. The majority of interpreting and translation educators are now trained in the field and are also practitioners. Some have even graduated from the new Master in T&I pedagogy from Macquarie University and some have PhDs in interpreting and translation.
6. Australia has led the way in community interpreting education and service provision. One of the first key books on community interpreting was published in Australia, authored by Adolfo Gentile, Uldis Ozolins and Mary Vasilakakos in 1996: "Liaison Interpreting. A handbook."

Dr Judy Wakabayashi, in her 1994 Jill Blewett lecture, spoke of the importance of training and of her hope for better-trained educators. I am sure Judy must be pleased with the improvements we have made in that area.

Although I had obtained a good grounding in my interpreting and translation degree, especially in translation theory and practice, the theory of interpreting, particularly community interpreting, was virtually non-existent, as very little research had been conducted in that field. My initial practice as an interpreter, and more specifically as a court interpreter, generated many questions that could not be answered by research. This motivated me to get involved in research, firstly by doing a PhD in court interpreting (the first in the country, as far as I'm aware) and then through further research in my academic career.

I must confess I found it difficult to accept my first full-time academic position because I loved my work as an interpreter and translator. However, I felt that I would be able to contribute more to the advancement of the profession and of the discipline in my new role, while continuing to practise on a part-time basis.

I'll highlight the next advances:

7. New research into community interpreting (incorporating legal and medical) is conducted in Australia and other parts of the world.
8. Research results became an integral part of our university interpreting and translation programs from the 1990s to date.
9. Results of research are being applied to the practice.

I will now present some examples of what we have learned from Australian-based research into community interpreting, which is where we lead the way internationally. I apologise in advance for featuring prominently in the review of research, but my own research is what I am most familiar with and can speak most comfortably about.

Issues of accuracy in court interpreting

Based on findings of forensic linguistic research, and using discourse analysis as a tool, I have conducted research into naturally-occurring data of Spanish-English interpreted proceedings as well as experimental studies to triangulate the results (Hale, 1996, 1999, 2001, 2004). These studies have given us insights into the complexities of court interpreting and the challenges in achieving accurate renditions. Some points to highlight from this research are:

- Many interpreters were found to be unaware of the strategic use of language in the adversarial courtroom and therefore made choices that could have affected the intended tactics used by lawyers.
- Many interpreters tended to omit seemingly superfluous discourse features, such as discourse markers (e.g. “*well*”, “*you see*”, “*now*”) which have important pragmatic meaning in the courtroom.
- Tag questions, which are common in cross-examination, are difficult to interpret and were also often omitted.
- The importance of the way answers are interpreted in the evaluation of witness credibility was an important point that came out of the experimental research.
- Lawyers are often unaware of the interpreting process and of how best to work with interpreters.
- Judicial officers are also often unaware of interpreters’ professional needs.

Discourse analysis of medical interpreting interactions

Helen Tebble (1999, 2003) has been a pioneer in analysing the discourse of medical interpreting. Within a discourse analytical framework, she has identified the different discourse types found in medical consultations and has highlighted the importance of ethical and accurate interpreting. Helen Tebble has also been a pioneer in training medical practitioners about how to best work with interpreters. Some main findings from Tebble are:

- The importance of establishing the 'contract' at the start of the consultation
- The importance of accurately rendering discourse features that help build up a rapport between doctor and patient
- The importance of the manner as well as the content of the message, both of which need to be accurately rendered when interpreting.

Practitioners' voices

The next area of research I would like to highlight relates to surveys of practising interpreters and translators to elicit their opinions. These surveys have sought to give practitioners a voice. I will briefly discuss some of the results of three major surveys. The first one is the survey by Terry Cheshier, Helen Slatyer, Vadim Doubine, Lia Jaric and Rosy Lazzari (2003), which sought the views of interpreters in Australia and in a number of other countries about their views about their role and ethical obligations.

Uldis Ozolins (2004) conducted a survey of Victorian practitioners to gather information about practitioners' profiles, including issues of accreditation, training, professional development, remuneration and general satisfaction with their status.

Hale has also conducted a number of surveys of practitioners, including the recent one for the NAATI review, but I would like to highlight now the survey on community interpreters' positive experiences, which was published in 2011. Some results worth highlighting from these surveys are:

- Most interpreters are aware of their role as prescribed by the code of ethics and are happy to adhere to it.
- Trained interpreters resent the fact that they are not given preference over untrained interpreters or are not better remunerated.
- Working conditions and pay rates are among the main complaints from practising interpreters.
- Lack of understanding of their role from those who work with them is another source of frustration for practising interpreters.
- Community interpreters draw great satisfaction from their work, as they can appreciate the significance of their contribution to a multicultural society.
- Interpreters value being recognised and appreciated by those who benefit from their services.

The following are some quotations from practising interpreters:

“Working as a community interpreter is for me extremely rewarding. I absolutely love it. Our role is so diverse and so important. I really believe that I make a difference in my everyday work environment. It gives me a strong sense of pride.” (Practising interpreter – in Hale, 2011a:234)

“It gives me great satisfaction after each assignment when I see the relief on the NESBs' faces and I get many appreciative comments from service providers expressing how easy I made their job and how good I was.

Interpreting to me is more than a job from which I earn money. It is a passion for me to help people understand exactly what is being said to them and to make them understood.” (Practising interpreter – in Hale, 2011a:242)
Working conditions in court interpreting

Stern (2003), Hale & Stern (2011) have compared the conditions of court interpreters in international courts of justice and domestic courts in Europe with Australian courts of justice. The main results can be summarised as:

- Interpreters who work in international courts of justice enjoy optimum conditions which are not shared by interpreters who work in domestic courts.
- Such conditions include: working in pairs in booths in the simultaneous mode, having access to all the relevant documents and to adequate bilingual resources, being able to interact freely with the judiciary and lawyers when needed and being paid adequate wages.
- If interpreters are to perform at their optimum level and serve the justice system well, they must be given adequate working conditions.

Signed Language Interpreting

Jemina Napier is an international leader in signed language research. Her research has included analysing SL interpreters' coping strategies (2002), interpreters' omissions and the reasons behind them (2003), SL training and educational resources (2004), and she has recently (2008) been involved in researching the feasibility of deaf people serving as jurors with interpreters. I will highlight some of the results of her preliminary experimental study on the accuracy of the interpretation and the level of comprehension of the deaf people who

benefit from the interpretation, in comparison to hearing jurors:

- The interpretation rendered by highly qualified Auslan interpreters was over 80% accurate.
- Deaf jurors had the same level of comprehension of the proceedings as did hearing jurors, thus showing that accurate interpreting can place the deaf person in the same position as hearing jurors.

Issues surrounding Aboriginal interpreting

Michael Cooke (1995, 2009) has conducted the bulk of the research into the challenges faced by Aboriginal court interpreters. The main findings from his ethnographic linguistic analyses of interpreted proceedings are:

- The vast cultural differences between Aboriginal languages and English mean that many concepts cannot be readily interpreted and need further explanations from interpreters.
- Many Aboriginal people speak what on the surface appears to be standard English, but it is often pragmatically different and can cause communication breakdowns. This situation may lead to the incorrect assumption that interpreters are not needed.
- Questions have very different functions in Aboriginal languages from those in the English language courtroom and consequently courtroom question can be problematic to interpret.

Although I have only reviewed a small portion of the research conducted by Australian researchers (and I apologise to those whose work I didn't review), I hope to have provided a glimpse of the excellent work that has

taken place in the past 25 years and continues to increase in volume, quality, relevance, scope and applicability.

We are now seeing the impact of much of our research: the increased interest by other disciplines in collaborating with interpreting scholars and the increase in external funding from the Australian Research Council and other funding bodies, in order to conduct large scale research. Below are two examples of such research projects:

Title	Researchers	Funding bodies
Interpreters in court. Witness credibility with interpreted testimony	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Professor Sandra Hale (Leader, UNSW) -Associate Professor Ludmila Stern (UNSW) -Professor David Tait (UWS) Sociologist -Dr Uldis Ozolins -Dr Meredith Rossner (UWS) Criminologist -Professor Jane Goodman-Delahunty (CSU) Psychologist and lawyer -Associate Professor Jemina Napier (MU) -Diane Jones, architect (PTW Architects) 	Australian Research Council Linkage Grant Partner Organisations: Australasian Institute of Judicial Administration (AIJA), Department of Attorney General and Justice (NSW), Department of Justice (Vic), PTW Architects, ONCALL Interpreters and Translators, Australian Federation of Deaf Societies/Sign Language Communications,

		Department of Justice and Attorney General (Qld), ICE Design Australia Pty Ltd.
Participation in the administration of justice: deaf citizens as jurors	-A/Prof. Jemina Napier (Leader, MU), -Prof. Sandra Hale (UNSW), -Prof. David Spencer, -Prof Debra Russell (Canada)	Australian Research Council Linkage Grant Linkage Partners: Deaf Australia, Australian Federation of Deaf Societies, ASLIA NSW

The next on our list of advances relates to the raising of awareness of interpreting issues among the legal profession and their willingness to effect change. This is evident in the many invitations some of us have received to speak to the judiciary, tribunal members and lawyers at their own conferences and workshops. The Australasian Institute of Judicial Administration (AIJA), for example, organised a national conference on interpreting issues in 2009 which led to the funding of a national survey of interpreters, judicial officers and tribunal members, the results of which have been published as a report (see Hale, 2011b), which is freely available on their website¹.

This report has been well received around Australia and used as a basis for discussion on improving interpreter protocols in the courts. This year there was another very important conference on interpreting held in Darwin, where such protocols were also discussed and another national workshop of interested parties is being planned for next year (2013) to discuss concrete ways of implementing the report's recommendations.

¹ <http://www.aija.org.au/online/Pub%20no89.pdf>

The legal system's involvement with interpreting issues has been further enhanced by its participation as partner in an Australian Research Council Linkage grant that I am leading with a distinguished group of researchers from different disciplines as can be seen above.

The last area of progress I would like to highlight relates to NAATI. As we have already heard in this conference, NAATI this year funded a review of its testing and accreditation system known as the INT project (Improvements to NAATI Testing). This shows NAATI's willingness to openly monitor and scrutinise its practices with the aim of making improvements and keeping its place as world leader as a national T&I accreditation body.

NAATI's official involvement with Aboriginal languages is another great achievement, as we heard on Saturday from John Beever, the NAATI Chief Executive Officer.

Where have we not made much progress?

I have highlighted the very significant progress we have made thus far. The areas that have remained somewhat stagnant seem to fall into the following categories:

1. Lack of a requirement for any type of training prior to becoming accredited, in order to raise the standards of all practitioners.
2. Universal availability of training for all language combinations.
3. Application of research to testing instruments and assessment methods.
4. Working conditions and pay rates.

Areas 1-3 relate to an aspect of interpreting and translation that I am most passionate about, and that is

the issue of human rights. Citing again from Adolfo Gentile's 2008 Jill Blewett lecture:

"If the right to employ one's own language, at least in dealing with officialdom, is considered to be a human right, it follows that the denial of it is the denial of a human right and less than adequate interpretation or translation is also a denial of a human right" (Gentile, 2008:4-5).

There are two essential points to highlight here:

1. Access to interpreting and translation services and
2. Access to quality interpreting and translation services.

The first, without the second, cannot ensure access and equity and remains a breach of the principle of the human right to express oneself in the way one chooses. This is the INT project researchers' underlying motivation for the reforms we are recommending for our national accreditation system.

3. Working conditions and pay rates are related also to quality of services. I am optimistic that at least in the legal field this will also soon improve, when the link between quality, conditions and pay rates becomes more obvious to all involved.

We have the next 25 years to work on these four areas, and as I have just shown in my review, we have already started working on some of them.

Conclusion

Having taken stock of what we have achieved, I can't help but feel that we have matured as a profession and as a discipline in many ways.

One important way we have matured is in our ability to work together towards a common goal. I remember in the past there were strong feelings of competition between educational institutions, between NAATI and AUSIT, and between practitioners and academics.

I am heartened by what we are now witnessing among us: collegiality, cooperation and complementarity. I hope we can keep up this positive attitude. We cannot afford to be divided. We cannot afford to look out for our own individual interests. We are too small and too fragile. We must work together for the benefit of the discipline and the profession as a whole.

I have tried to give an overview of our achievements in interpreting and translation as a nation to demonstrate that we have real reason to celebrate.

We have achieved a lot, and considering all the obstacles we have had on the way, I believe we should all be very proud of those achievements. These obstacles have made us resilient. We have the strength to keep going.

So, what lies ahead? We must continue our efforts to raise our standards and improve our services so that we can demand better pay and working conditions.

We all must work together, as practitioners, agencies, accreditation body, educators, researchers and users of interpreting services, to ensure that the next 25 years will be as productive as the last 25.

So, are we there yet? Children often ask this question in the car on the way to an exciting destination. That feeling of impatience betrays their immaturity. As I said earlier, I feel we have reached maturity as a profession and as a

discipline, and therefore must be patient. We are not quite there yet, but we are on our way.

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