

Tapestry as a Metaphor

"Translation is always a treason, and as a Ming author observes, can at its best be only the reverse side of a brocade, – all the threads are there, but not the subtlety of colour or design" (Kakuzo, 2000, p. 42). Cervantes said it this way, "Still it seems to me that translation from one language into another, if it be not from the queens of languages, the Greek and the Latin, is like looking at Flemish tapestries on the wrong side; for though the figures are visible, they are full of threads that make them indistinct, and they do not show with the smoothness and brightness of the right side" (Cervantes, 1615). Translation and interpretation are different in that translation often works to or from a written form and can be edited before publication whereas interpretation is verbal/auditory and, in the case of sign language, manual/visual, and occurs nearly in real time with the communication. The tapestry symbol is poignant for interpreting as well as translating. Not only does the tapestry metaphor hold true linguistically, but it is also effective to describe the skill sets we use and even to describe our relationships in the field.

When we look at the languages we use in interpretation, we find frequently that there are not exact equivalents between these languages. We look for these equivalents, but sometimes have to sacrifice the poetry of the language to keep the interpretation conceptually accurate. The words, phrases, sentences, intonation, and culture threads come together to create a beautiful tapestry in the source language. We receive that message and try to recreate it using equivalent words, phrases, sentences, and intonation. Unfortunately, the irreconcilable threads can leave our interpretation with misplaced threads and a fuzzy picture. Our biggest challenges come in figurative language, idioms, slang, and jokes. As much as we would like it to be, interpretation is not perfect, but recognizing that, we can make it the best it can be.

Additionally, our skill sets can be described in terms of a tapestry. On the front side, it is obvious we have specific language skills including the grammar and vocabulary of two or more languages. These threads are woven together to make the picture most people see of interpreting. In addition, we utilize skills that are not so obvious. The back of the tapestry is full of the threads that truly hold the interpretation together: processing, memory, visualization, cultural information and mediation, and interpersonal skills, just to name a few. As we know, skill in two languages does not an interpreter make.

Finally, all the relationships between the people involved in interpreting can be a tapestry. On the surface, sign language interpreters are often designated as being there "for the deaf person." Of course, we know we are there for everyone, deaf and hearing, involved in the communication act. What is often not recognized are the relationships with the clients and agencies that pay for the service. Additionally, we have relationships with each other: teamed assignments, shared assignments, mentoring relationships, and friendships over shared understanding of our profession.

Interpreting is a tapestry of languages, culture, skills, and relationships. By effectively recognizing and working with these threads, interpreting doesn't have to be treason, but can be a wonderfully effective way for people to communicate when they don't speak the same language. It is from these quotes and metaphors that "The Interpreter's Tapestry" was named. With it I hope to add another understanding of the metaphor: threads as the resources that help us build our skills, knowledge, and understanding for interpreting.

Bibliography

Cervantes, M. d. (1615). *Don Quixote by Miguel de Cervantes: Chapter LXII*. Retrieved July 1, 2009, from The Literature Network: http://www.online-literature.com/cervantes/don_quixote/120/

Kakuzo, O. (2000). *The Book of Tea: The Illustrated Classic Edition*. Boston: Tuttle Publishing.