INTRODUCTION

“Time and space have long cushioned intercultural encounters, confining them to touristic exchanges. But this insulation is rapidly wearing in the world of tomorrow we can expect to live – not merely vacation – in societies which seek different values and abide by different codes. […] If people currently show little tolerance or talent for encounters with alien cultures, how can they learn to deal with constant and inescapable coexistence?”

(Barnlund 1989:36)

In 2005, the picture of the future painted by Barnlund in the above quote has become very familiar to us, with contacts with people from different cultures being the norm in the most diverse contexts. Firstly, global economy has brought about an extraordinary growth of international business contacts in the last few years, and people are doing business and travelling across the globe to an extent that was unimaginable only a few decades ago. Secondly, because of the continuous immigration flows, most developed and developing societies today have to cope with issues regarding integration of cultural and linguistic minorities. Finally, the Internet, which has facilitated and reduced the cost of communication, has given unprecedented impetus to the building of relationships across continents.
In this framework, intercultural communications have certainly increased, but not necessarily improved, as reflected in the frequent use of the expression “culture clash”. The development of intercultural relationships at different levels thus becomes paramount in our multicultural societies.

Against this background, it is desirable that people working in different sectors develop a certain degree of competence in intercultural communication. Special attention to these issues should be paid by all those who live or work at the crossroads of different cultures, such as immigration officers and police staff, hospital workers, lawyers and judges, businesspeople and teachers. Interpreters must certainly be added to the list, since they provide the link which allows two people, institutions, or cultures to communicate.

The title chosen for the present work, *Two languages, two cultures, two worlds: the interpreter’s challenge*, stresses this particular aspect of the interpreter’s work. Obviously, the interpreter is viewed as a bridge between two languages, performing the first basic function of any translator and interpreter. The interpreter is also seen as mediating between two cultures, i.e. distinct sets of values, beliefs and shared knowledge within the speakers’ respective communities. Finally, the two “worlds” mentioned in the title refer to the individuals actually involved in any interaction, who are the result of a unique mixture of genetic, environmental and cultural factors. The interpreter’s action as a cultural mediator poses a “challenge”, since interpreting is much more complex than simply acting as the ‘translating machine’ it is often viewed as.
Through the analysis of a corpus collected especially for the purposes of the present research, consisting of recordings of authentic mediated encounters in the trade fair context, the study presented in this volume aims at exploring how interpreters provide cultural mediation. This aspect of the interpreter’s work is viewed as one of a number of the dialogue interpreter’s roles in interaction, as discussed in Chapter Four.

Observations on the interpreters’ role as mediators are formulated within the framework of some of the most influential theories of intercultural communication studies. The usefulness of these theories in studying interpreter-mediated events as intercultural encounters is also explored in the present work.

Following an overview of the research presented in Chapter One, Chapter Two presents a detailed description of the corpus and of how it was collected. Chapter Three introduces some of the founding theories of intercultural communication studies, focussing in particular on the concepts of “context” and “encyclopaedic knowledge”. Chapter Four explores the various roles of dialogue interpreters in interaction, the analysis of cases taken from the corpus making it possible to focus on how the interpreter can coordinate and mediate the interaction between parties. Chapter Five explores to what extent the interpreters concerned actually act as cultural mediators, by analysing cases from the corpus with reference to the theories of intercultural communication and interpreting studies introduced in Chapters Three and Four respectively. Finally, Chapter Six presents the results of the present work and suggests possible developments and applications of the research.
Research overview

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the main concepts on which the present research work is founded in the wider framework of interpreting and communication studies.

Interpreting studies have over the years often been treated as a sub-discipline of translation studies, which have enjoyed the status of an academic subject for much longer and are considered as a discipline in their own right (Pöchhacker 2004). In more recent years, however, interpreting research has grown into an independent field of study benefiting from contributions of several fields. Gile (2001) reports that after an early interest in the cognitive and psychological aspects of interpreting, starting from the late 1980s research has made widespread use of theories and methods drawn from other disciplines, namely psychology, linguistics and neurophysiology. Today we may add to the list discourse and conversation analysis, intercultural studies, ethnomethodology and sociology (Garzone and Viezzi 2001) as well as communication and media studies. The fact that interpreting activities can be studied from so many varied perspectives testifies to the great complexity of the interpreting process and is one reason for the apparently multifaceted nature of interpreting studies.

The present work is offered as a contribution to a field which is gaining more and more attention within the academic world, that is the cultural implications of translation activities, by exploring the role of
the interpreter as intercultural mediator\textsuperscript{1}. The analysis takes an interdisciplinary approach, drawing concepts and theories from several disciplines, namely intercultural communication, translation studies and linguistics as a whole. The following sections introduce the main fields of research which this study brings together.

1.1 Main features of the study

This research work is based on the observation of communication patterns in interpreter-mediated events (hereafter IMEs) involving speakers of Italian and English in the trade fair context. The research focuses on IMEs as a special case of communicative event and on the role(s) of the interpreter in this type of communication. Although perhaps obvious, it is worth remarking that, in interpreting studies, the purely communicative function of the interpreter’s work has often been overshadowed by a focus on other, more specific – or technical – aspects of the profession. Until recently, most interpreting research has concerned conference interpreting and, as Gile (2000) points out, studies have dealt mainly with training issues (with a special focus on consecutive interpreting), problems concerning access to the profession and working conditions, and cognitive issues. Problems related to language skills and combinations are also dealt with in a lot of studies. Against this general background, Wadensjö’s (1998) work on court interpreting marks an important change of perspective, highlighting that interpreting is an interactional process in which the

\textsuperscript{1} In the present work, the term “mediator” or “(inter)cultural mediator” is used to indicate “an agent regulating the evolution of understanding” (Pöchhacker 2004:59). It does not refer to the specific professional figure acting as an intermediary between any representative of a minority ethnic group and the institutions of the host country (Luka 2005:203).
interpreter plays a prominent role in fostering communication. Following this line of thought, the present study stresses the oldest and truest function of interpreting, that is to enable communication between people who do not speak a common language and, in a wider sense,

“aider des individus ou des groupes humains à mieux se connaître, à mieux se comprendre, plus encore à davantage se respecter mutuellement et, s’ils le désirent, à se mettre d’accord.”

(Herbert, quoted in Mead 2002)

The study focuses on the way the interpreter uses language and other communication tools to mediate between the two parties in terms of concepts expressed and communication style. Through the observation of the communicative processes presented in the corpus, this study aims at exploring the interpreter’s fulfilment of different roles (i.e. coordinator, mediator, facilitator, translator) between speakers of Italian and English in the trade fair context. I also wish to use the study as a basis for arguing that instruments of analysis offered by the intercultural approach may be useful to interpreters, as a means of improving their performance and achieving greater professional fulfilment.

1.2 The project in the ESP framework

Today English is so widespread throughout the world, and in the most varied contexts, that its ‘special’ uses have become countless,
with “ESP” being used more and more as an umbrella term. One way of appreciating the widening scope of ESP is to consider the range of papers published in the English for Specific Purposes journal, which reflect “the evolution of scholarship in the various subareas of ESP, with EST [English for Science and Technology] now making way for business, academic and vocational concerns” (Editorial, Vol. 20, no. 2, 2001).

Against this general background, the present study originated in the framework of a doctoral research in English for Special Purposes (ESP) at Naples University Federico II. Analysing English as the language of mediation in meetings between speakers of Italian and English in the trade fair context, the study falls within the general field of ESP for several reasons.

First and foremost, English is here viewed as the language used in the framework of a well-established profession, that of the interpreter. Though interpreting is an ancient human practice, the recognition of the interpreter’s professional status is relatively recent (Wadensjö 1998). The traditional supremacy of writing over the spoken word has perhaps contributed to the tendency to place translation studies over interpreting studies in the academic hierarchy, and the low prestige enjoyed by people acting as interpreters in the past (Merlini 2005). Indeed, for centuries interpreting was usually entrusted to so-called ‘natural’ interpreters, that is bilinguals with no specific training who happened to be at hand when some impromptu translation was needed.

Conference interpreters gained recognition of their professional status following the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, when a recognisable consecutive interpreting technique was adopted for the
first time, and the Nuremberg Trial in 1945-6, when simultaneous interpreting was for the first time tested on a large scale (Pöchhacker 2004). In the 1950s the first international associations of interpreters (among which the AIIC) were set up to provide guidelines in terms of working conditions, professional standards and codes of ethics (ibid.).

The prestige and status of conference interpreting derived from the milieu within which interpreters worked, that is international organisations, diplomacy and international politics (Gentile et al. 1996; Pöchhacker 2004; Merlini 2005). The professionalisation of dialogue interpreting\(^3\) started much more recently, as the result of a twofold process. On the one hand Wadensjö (1998) highlights that, because interpreters are more and more part of the daily life of public institutions, these have come to appreciate the work of professionals as compared to the unskilled bilinguals who used to provide relatively ad hoc interpreting services in the past. On the other hand, a growing professional awareness has been recorded in the interpreting community, leading to the emergence of interpreters’ associations, educational programmes and certification examinations (Wadensjö 1998). Mack (2005) also stresses that, in some countries like Italy, institutions have felt the urgent need for interpreters working in the public sphere only as a consequence of recent immigration flows, with a consequent lack of specific legislation setting out professional standards.

The second reason for which the present study falls within the general framework of ESP is that interpreting, as a recognised

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\(^3\) For a more detailed discussion of the terms adopted in the present research see Section 1.6
profession, increasingly requires specific training and accreditation. This need is manifested in the growing number of institutions offering interpreter training programs (Mack 2004; Pöchhacker 2004). Starting from the 1970s, the institutionalisation of interpreter training gave a major contribution to the development of interpreting research, as did the launching of specific journals (Gile 2000:312). The changed requirements for access to teaching careers in university departments offering interpreting courses (which included academic research into interpreting-related issues), coupled with the stimulus of publishing in the recently established journals, brought about an acceleration in the output of academic research into conference interpreting. As Gile (2001a) points out, such research originated mainly from the interest in the mental processes involved in speaking and listening simultaneously, and was carried out to a limited extent from the 1950s through the early 1970s by professional interpreters and psycholinguists alike. In the following decades, a greater number of professionals and researchers from adjacent disciplines contributed a wealth of new insights into this field (ibid.).

As happened with professional recognition, in terms of academic research dialogue interpreting again followed a different path. In the Introduction to their work, Gentile et al. (1996) highlight the “slow and scattered” nature of research into liaison interpreting, which they partly ascribe to issues of status and role definition of the profession. Similarly, Wadensjö (1998) highlights that today “the body of theoretical knowledge is relatively little in the field”. Only a few years later, however, Pöchhacker (2004) reports considerable developments
in research into community interpreting\textsuperscript{4}, especially as a result of the series of conferences \textit{The Critical Link} (and related publications) and of the outstanding work of a few researchers like Cecilia Wadensjö. The great popularity interpreting is currently enjoying – both as a profession and an academic subject – is also reported by Mack (2004).

The third consideration linking the present study to the field of ESP is that the consolidation of interpreting as an academic subject and the spread of interpreter training courses have also contributed to a more clear-cut differentiation between translation, interpreting and language studies as a whole. This has reinforced the distinctive nature of interpreting as compared to these two long-established fields of study.

Against this broad epistemological background, interpreting activities can be observed and analysed from a number of different perspectives and for a number of different purposes. Indeed, interpreting research seems to be characterised by an interdisciplinary approach, with contributions coming mostly from linguistics, cognitive psychology and communication studies (Mack 2004). Examples of subfields of research are language-specific issues and particular language combinations, cognitive, quality, training and professional issues. The different settings in which interpreting can take place are a factor for further specialisation of the research: in addition to the main distinction between conference interpreting and face-to-face or dialogue interpreting, studies may concentrate on interpreting in

\textsuperscript{4} “Community interpreting” is here used to indicate “healthcare interpreting (medical interpreting, hospital interpreting) and legal interpreting” (Pöchhacker 2004:15), that is the main subfield of dialogue interpreting together with business interpreting.
“police, immigration and welfare services interviews, doctor-patient interviews, business negotiations” (Mason 1999), just to mention the most common settings.

The present research project focuses on dialogue interpreting in a special type of business context, that is the trade fair. Meetings in this setting display peculiar characteristics which distinguish them from business negotiations in a wider sense and, obviously, from interpreting in other contexts.\(^5\)

Another interesting aspect of the ‘special’ use of English (although less relevant to the field of ESP in a strict sense) in this study is the fact that in the trade fairs concerned an interpreting service was available only in the English-Italian language combination. This means that all the non-Italian participants in the interactions communicate in English, which becomes the *lingua franca* they share with the interpreters.

### 1.3 IMEs as a special case of spoken interaction

Within the professional communities of translators and interpreters, the words “interpreting” and “translation” commonly refer to oral and written texts respectively, though the emphasis on orality fails to take signed language interpreting into account. However, the term “interpreting” is also a hyponym of “translation” as a general activity, and the majority of dictionary entries for “interpret” stress its “dependence on the concept of translating, stated by all [the dictionaries consulted] to be specifically oral in nature” (Mead 1999). Interestingly, in defining the interpreter’s work, the official voices of

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\(^5\) For a more detailed description of encounters in the trade fair context, see Section 2.2
two major interpreter communities avoid using the verb “translate” and its derivatives altogether, as if to stress the difference between the two activities. The website of SCIC (the Joint Interpreting and Conference Service of the European Commission) provides the following definition:

“Conference interpreting deals exclusively with oral communication: rendering a message from one language into another […]. It should not be confused with translation which deals only with written texts”.
(http://europa.eu.int/comm/scic/interpreting/faq_en.htm)

Similarly, the website of AIIC (Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence), arguably the most prestigious international association of professional interpreters, stresses that:

“A conference interpreter is a professional language and communication expert who […] conveys the meaning of a speaker’s message orally and in another language to listeners who would not otherwise understand. The work of a conference interpreter is an oral intellectual exercise which is quite distinct from written translation and requires different training and qualifications”.
(http://www.aiic.net/en/prof/default.htm)

Although both definitions refer specifically to conference interpreting, for the purposes of this work the main idea conveyed – that is an oral process of reformulation from one language into another – can certainly be extended to face-to-face interpreting.

These preliminary remarks provide a background to certain features of dialogue interpreting, on which the present research work focuses. As stated above, the commonly identified distinctive feature of interpreting as opposed to translation is its oral nature, meaning that interpreting studies overlap to a certain extent with the study of speech.
and oral communication as a whole. Within this perspective, dialogue or face-to-face interpreting has much more in common with spontaneous dialogue than do simultaneous or consecutive interpreting (Jekat 2002). This is because users of dialogue interpreting speak rather freely, do not follow a pre-established order and often interrupt each other and the interpreter, so that statements, questions, answers, stances follow each other at very short intervals (Del Rosso 1997). Dialogue interpreting is characterised by the small number and physical proximity of participants, meaning a greater interaction between participants and the interpreter. It also entails the necessity to translate in both directions at very short intervals and the interpreter’s greater responsibility in coordinating turns of talk (Wadensjö 1998).

In order to reach a better understanding of communication in situations where face-to-face interpreting is provided, it may be useful to look at some of the characteristics of speech at large and compare them to those of dialogue interpreting situations described above. As a general rule, spoken language has a temporary nature, and is therefore closely tied to the context in which it is produced; also, spontaneous speech is characterised by “the frequent repetitions, hesitations, reformulations and general ungrammaticalities that are missing from the written mode” (Taylor 1998:112). Bazzanella identifies three major factors in the definition of speech, that is the oral channel, a shared extra-linguistic context and the simultaneous presence of speaker and interlocutor(s) (1994:14). These three factors are common to face-to-face interpreting, which is characterised by a dialogical mode of communication (as opposed to conference interpreting, where communication is mostly monological).
In describing the main features of dialogue, Crystal (2003) interestingly observes that:

“The stereotype is that people speak in complete sentences, taking well-defined turns, carefully listening to each other, and producing balanced amounts of speech. The reality is that people often share in the sentences they produce, interrupt each other, do not pay attention to everything that is said, and produce a discourse where the contributions of the participants are wildly asymmetrical”.

(Crystal 2003:295)

In a discussion of the main characteristics of dialogue, one of the two macro-features identified by Bazzanella (2002) is interactivity (the other being intentionality). The way in which these affect language use is summarised in the diagram below:

![Fig. 1.1 Main traits of dialogue (following Bazzanella 1994 and 2002)](image)

**1.4 Meaning construction in IMEs**

Ultimately, all the elements of dialogue shown in Fig. 1.1 are part of the communication process, which is represented in simplified form in the following diagram:
Fig. 1.2 The main elements of the communication process (Shannon and Weaver, in Kaunzner 2005:64)

Basically, the speaker (or sender) formulates a message and expresses it in a certain code (which must be, at least partly, shared by the listener/receiver); at the end of the process, the message reaches its intended receiver – possibly in a form which is not too distant from the speaker’s intention. Every message is usually followed by a feedback token and/or a response, where the same process takes place again with speaker and listener exchanging roles. In real situations, a number of ‘interferences’ make this basic pattern much more complex: these can be simply noise (making the intelligibility of the message more difficult) or other factors such as nonverbal cues, differences in perception due to the interlocutors’ different experiences and lack of attention or of necessary knowledge (Stanton 2004). In addition, as Sergio Viaggio (2003) remarks, “every interlocutor sieves his/her comprehension through his/her own interest or indifference in or even resistance to understanding”. It follows that the cognitive processes involved in communication are of a highly complex nature, since two or more individuals engage in an exchange of information as well as of feelings, ideas and emotions using a number of channels simultaneously (Kaunzner 2005). The analysis of the cognitive processes leading to the construction of meaning in communicative events is beyond the scope of the present research work. It is interesting, however, to identify the main dynamics of communication
to better appreciate the role and action of the interpreter in conveying meaning between the two main parties.

The process represented in Fig. 1.2 applies when both interlocutors share the same code of communication, which is most often a common language. When they do not share a common language or do so only in part, the exchange (if there is any) is likely to result in a weakened communication act, not only at the morphological and syntactic levels, but also at the pragmatic level (Bazzanella 2002). In such cases, an interpreter can act as a sort of ‘bridge’ providing the missing link (that is, the common code) between the two interlocutors. While making the interaction possible, however, the presence of the interpreter makes the interaction much more complex, as shown in the model below:

As this pattern shows, the construction of meaning in conversations mediated by an interpreter is a complex process. Unlike monolingual encounters, where each intended meaning is processed only twice (in the speaker’s wording of the idea and in the listener’s perception and interpretation of those words), in IMEs there are two
additional passages, namely the interpreter’s reception of meaning and his/her reformulation in the target language. In other words, this means that, in an interpreting encounter “the ‘translational meaning’ is a direct – and unpredictable – result of a triadic interaction with the combined input of three parties” (Rudvin 2002:218).

1.5 Meaning and perception: Hofstede’s “Mental Programs”

A number of elements play a significant role in communication besides language (Levinson 1985, Goffman 1989, Angelelli 2000, Seleskovitch and Lederer 2001, Stanton 2004, S. Dahl 2005). Among these are context, relations of power, body and eye movements, space organisation and touching behaviour, as well as some paralinguistic items such as accents, intonation and speed of talking. These behavioural aspects of communication may vary widely from person to person, from community to community and – on a wider scale – from culture to culture. The way in which a person communicates, both verbally and nonverbally, tells us a lot about his/her cultural identity (determined by gender, race, education, etc.) and social identity (i.e. the identity an individual takes on in a particular circumstance and in the presence of certain interlocutors) (Kramsch 1998).

An individual’s social and cultural identities also determine the way in which s/he perceives the world around him/her, that is the way in which s/he will interpret a given message on the basis of previous experience, context and expectations. Singer goes as far as stating that “in terms of human behaviour there exists (for people) only subjective reality – that is, the universe as individuals perceive it” (1969/1998:97). Geert Hofstede considers perceptions to be
determined by mental mechanisms occurring at different levels. His well-known definition of culture as “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category from another” (2001:9) is part of a three-level system (or model) characterising each individual’s mental programming. This system is represented as a pyramid subdivided into three levels, each of which represents a level of programming acting as a filter for our perceptions:

![Fig. 1.4 Hofstede’s Three Levels of Mental Programming (2001:3)](image)

The universal level, at the bottom, is shared by all human beings and is entirely inherited: it includes the functioning of the human body, but also a range of expressive behaviours like laughing and crying. The collective level is, again, shared – but this time only with a group or category of people, and is acquired or learnt. This level includes language, concepts like status and power, time and space management. It also determines when and why we would have recourse to some universal behaviours like laughing and crying. The level at the top of the pyramid accounts for individuality, and highlights the fact that no two people “are programmed exactly alike, not even identical twins reared together” (ibid., 2). At this level, part of our programming is inherited (which explains people’s different abilities and
temperaments), and we are offered a range of alternative behaviours within the collective culture to which we belong. Needless to say, like any model, Hofstede’s model of Human Mental Programming is a simplified representation of reality which, by the researcher’s own admission, cannot account for the numberless situations at the borderline of different levels. In other words, it is probably difficult in actual practice to say whether a certain behaviour is the result of an action at the individual, collective or universal level, or a combination of factors at different levels. Hofstede’s model, however, has the advantage of categorising some aspects of human cognitive processes and providing a starting point for the analysis of meaning construction, especially from an intercultural perspective.

Katan integrates Hofstede’s model with a fourth filter, language, “which constrains and distorts reality” (2001:122). In doing so, he seems to be drawing on the long-established tradition of linguistic relativity – i.e. the idea that it is through language that we give shape to our thoughts:

“We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. [...] The world is presented through a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds – and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way – an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language”.

(Whorf 1956/1998:90)

This so-called “strong” version of Whorf’s hypothesis, whereby our thoughts are ‘prisoners’ of our language systems, has largely been discarded by the academic community (Kramsch 1998). However, a
‘weak hypothesis’ is today generally accepted, based on findings showing that:

“language users tend to sort out and distinguish experiences differently according to the semantic categories provided by their respective codes [and that] the resources provided by the linguistic code are understandable only against the larger pragmatic context of people’s experience”.

(Kramsch 1998:14)

Needless to say, if an encounter requires the assistance of an interpreter, then it will involve the use of at least two different languages. Insofar as languages are manifestations of cultures, such encounters will also tend to be intercultural.

1.6 Notes on interpreting definitions

As discussed above, face-to-face interpreting has received widespread recognition as both a profession and an academic discipline only quite recently. Arguably, this explains the variety of terms, often overlapping, that are used to define this type of activity (Russo 2004; Mack 2005). The many names given to the most ancient and widespread interpreting mode generally focus either on the setting (community, public service, court, business interpreting) or on the communication process (dialogue, liaison interpreting) (Sandrelli 2005). Mason summarises the situation by stating that “dialogue interpreting includes what is variously referred to in English as Community, Public Service, Liaison, Ad Hoc or Bilateral Interpreting – the defining characteristic being interpreter-mediated communication in spontaneous face-to-face interaction” (1999:147). Gentile et al. opt for the term “liaison interpreting”, to indicate situations where “two or
more interlocutors do not share a language and the interpreter must be present in order to bridge the communication gap” (1996:17).

Today the term “community interpreting” commonly refers to the interpreting activities whose main purpose is to “provide a critical link between service providers in legal, health and social service settings and clients with whom they do not share a common language” (http://www.criticallink.org/English/faq.htm). In the wake of the growing need for interpreters in the public sector as a result of the immigration flows to many Western countries, research on community interpreting has grown impressively in recent years (see, for example, Russo and Mack 2005, Mason 2001 and the success of events like the Critical Link conferences).

The present research work uses interchangeably the more general terms “dialogue interpreting”, “face-to-face interpreting” or “liaison interpreting”, which focus on the mode of interpreting rather than on the specific setting. In this perspective, any of these terms will be used to denote interpreting which the interpreter provides for two or more interlocutors in a face-to-face situation, involving a dialogical mode of communication. Whenever reference is made to a more specific interpreting mode or setting, this will be made explicit (e.g. dialogue interpreting in the trade fair setting).