

Philipp Sebastian Angermeyer. *Speak English or what? Codeswitching and interpreter use in New York City courts.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 248 pp. ISBN: 978-0-199-33756-9 (pbk).

Reviewed by Raphael Sannholm

In this important contribution to research on courtroom interpreting, Philipp Sebastian Angermeyer provides a comprehensive account of different linguistic and interpreting-related issues in New York City courts. Angermeyer explores and analyzes the implications of language choice, interpreter use, mode of interpreting and codeswitching in arbitration hearings within a broadly sociolinguistic framework, and shows convincingly how these issues influence non-English-speaking claimants' possibility of making their voices heard in court.

Speak English or what? is divided into seven chapters, where theoretical points of departure, presentation of empirical data, and analyses are intertwined throughout the text. The book is thus thematically organized according to the different aspects of analysis. The main arguments derived from Angermeyer's study are outlined in the first chapter and later reiterated throughout the text and summarized in the last chapter, creating a coherent and reader-friendly text. The first chapter also, albeit all too briefly, describes the methodology, that is, data collection through ethnographic observation and recordings of court hearings, which means that the empirical data analyzed comprise field notes and transcriptions. Sixty hearings were recorded, and some 200 hearings were observed. Additional data come from informal interviews and from archives.

Chapter 2 is devoted to the first category of people of interest to this study – the litigants (the others being arbitrators and interpreters, who take center-stage in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, respectively). In this chapter Angermeyer also sets the stage, outlining the nature of small claims court, the languages used in the three courts where the fieldwork took place, as well as the typical types of disputes that are dealt with. He also points to the asymmetrical power relationships that exist between litigants, where claimants typically are the ones who do not have English as their L1. (Angermeyer uses the acronym LOTE, language other than English, which he also applies, misleadingly, to participants in studies where none of the languages involved was English.) Consequently, these are also the litigants in need of interpreting. The defendants, in contrast, are often assisted by English-speaking attorneys or

are English speakers themselves. Angermeyer also discusses the different levels of legal consciousness that litigants have, and how this influences their behavior in court. In this context, drawing on sociolinguistic research on legal discourse, the concepts of *rule orientation* and *relationship orientation* are introduced (p. 38). This conceptual dichotomy is used to describe different orientations of participants in court, either towards the rules of the institution or in terms of the relationships between people, and it constitutes a recurring theme and analytical device throughout the book, applied not only to litigants but also to arbitrators and interpreters.

The third chapter begins by explaining the procedures of the court houses observed. The focus is exclusively on so-called arbitration hearings, and Angermeyer argues that this particular legal setting has certain negative implications for LOTE speakers. In arbitration hearings, litigants typically represent themselves. This calls for the use of an interpreter but, as the litigant's narrative is fragmented by the turn-taking associated with consecutive interpreting, this may hinder the litigant's attempt to provide a coherent account of the case. This becomes problematic, particularly as certain arbitrators display a lack of patience with the relative slowness of the interpreted account. Angermeyer differentiates between "fast" and "slow" arbitrators (p. 48), based on their typical way of conducting arbitration hearings, and he connects these arbitrator types to the distinction between rule-orientation and relationship-orientation. Fast arbitrators are typically more rule-oriented, and focus on efficiency in the proceedings, whereas slow, relationship-oriented arbitrators focus on the communication between the litigants and the court. Somewhat ironically, LOTE speakers are often assigned a "fast" arbitrator because courts view interpreting as time-consuming, which means that those supposedly in need of more time get less than those who manage without an interpreter.

The protagonists of Chapter 4 are the court interpreters. Angermeyer once again applies the orientation model to the participants in question and identifies different orientations within the court interpreter community. Some interpreters identify more clearly with the legal institution (rule-oriented) while others strive for enhanced communication between the litigants (relationship-oriented). Angermeyer argues that this orientation also coincides with a source-oriented versus a target-oriented approach in the interpreters' renditions. Thus it comes as no surprise that the rule-oriented interpreters seem to strive to a greater extent for adequacy, in Toury's (2012: 79) terms. This also follows logically from the fact that the code of ethics, to which interpreters are supposed to adhere, stresses the requirement for renditions to follow the source message closely. Quite a significant part of the chapter is devoted to the issue of indirect and direct translation, a practice which is also

regulated in the code of ethics. In this analysis, Angermeyer applies Wadensjö's (1998) conceptual distinction between *relaying by replaying* and *relaying by displaying*, which he takes to correspond to direct and indirect translation, respectively – perhaps overlooking the fact that the displaying mode is not limited to indirect speech, but may encompass other ways for the interpreter to convey that he or she is not the originator of the spoken message. Nevertheless, the author widens the perspective applied in previous research to account for situations in which a litigant is neither the source speech producer, nor the addressee, but finds him- or herself in “the role of an overhearer” (p. 83). This happens, for instance, when two English speakers' talk is interpreted in simultaneous mode back to the LOTE speaker. This may call for a “deictic shift” (p. 83) on the part of the interpreter – a change of participant perspective expressed by means of pronouns, in order to avoid misunderstandings as to who is addressing whom.

The fifth chapter begins by outlining differences between interpreter-mediated interaction and talk in the same language, and analyzes the implications of the mode of interpreting used. The consecutive mode is used when translating from the LOTE, and the simultaneous mode when translating into the LOTE. Angermeyer summarizes the implications by stating that “consecutive interpreting causes communication problems for the source speaker, whereas simultaneous interpreting causes communication problems for the target recipient” (p. 135). In both cases, the ones concerned are the LOTE speakers. Chapter 5 concludes with a call for a more selective use of interpreting in small claims court, a standby mode of sorts, for interpreters. The rationale here is that many of the issues involved in interpreter-mediated interaction are linked to the requirement that litigants speak their L1, regardless of whether their proficiency in the language of the court is sufficient. In support of this argument, Angermeyer discusses the rare case of a litigant appearing in court on two different occasions. The first time, he was told to speak his L1, Russian, which was interpreted into English. The second time, he was allowed to speak English, although an interpreter was present, and communication was significantly improved.

In the sixth chapter, Angermeyer discusses consequences of codeswitching. Because of the requirement to speak one's L1 in court, codeswitching into English is generally frowned upon, and it is sometimes even exploited to undermine the litigant's credibility and taken as a reason to question his or her need for an interpreter. However, Angermeyer claims that codeswitching is a way for LOTE-speaking litigants to communicate efficiently in court. This is achieved, for instance, by referring to certain central terms in English, thus creating

“lexical cohesion” (p. 170). Codeswitching is also used to gain the floor by addressing an arbitrator directly in English.

Angermeyer convincingly shows throughout this book how speaking a language other than English in court is a disadvantage for litigants, not only with regard to the possibility of making one’s voice heard, but also for the actual legal outcome. The book concludes by restating the arguments put forward, namely that the switch between different interpreting modes is disadvantageous to LOTE speakers; that codeswitching and language choice by litigants are often frowned upon or viewed with suspicion; that the requirement to only speak one’s L1 is detrimental to communication; and that the view of interpreting in US courts, where a talk-as-text perspective (Wadensjö 1998) is prevalent, causes an effect opposite to the one intended. He also repeats his call for a less rigid stance towards interpreter use and language choice in court, recommending that greater flexibility be allowed in these matters.

This study clearly makes an important contribution to our knowledge about dialogue interpreting in courts, and should be of interest to scholars not only from interpreting studies but also from various other fields of research. While readers looking for a thorough methodological account may be disappointed, the book nonetheless constitutes an example of insightful and rigorous scholarly work and, by drawing on research in different academic fields, illustrates the benefits of an interdisciplinary approach.

References

Toury, G. (2012). *Descriptive translation studies and beyond* (Rev. ed.). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Wadensjö, C. (1998). *Interpreting as interaction*. London/New York: Longman.