

BOOK REVIEWS

Franz Pöchhacker (Ed.). (2015) *Routledge encyclopedia of interpreting studies*. London: Routledge. ISBN 978-0-415-63432-8 (hbk), 978-1-315-67846-7 (ebk), 552 pp.

Reviewed by Graham H. Turner

To begin by stating the obvious, there can be little doubt that the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Interpreting Studies* (REIS) represents an overview of the discipline that will be a required acquisition for every institution and committed individual professionally engaged with this field. This 552-page book will be invaluable to established scholars as an immediate point of reference and a source of checks and balances; to anyone needing to produce a literature review within this field; to those new to the field, particularly at postgraduate level; and to those ‘dipping in’ to the ocean of interpreting studies (academics and others).

The reviewer’s task here is to acclaim, and draw attention to, the volume through a short description of its qualities, encouraging extension of the gains it embodies and – given that developments in the field will inevitably necessitate subsequent editions – looking forward to potential future enhancements. No-one who knows its editor, and the sustained quality of his output over the years, will be surprised for one moment that this volume represents a monumental achievement. REIS underlines Franz Pöchhacker’s standing as the pre-eminent, field-defining scholar of the era. His fundamental project across the decades has been to stimulate, integrate, and raise our collective game. *Nobody does it better*: we are all grateful beneficiaries of the dedication it takes to enact this role on our behalf.

It is customary in book reviews, before providing some evaluative commentary, to say a few words about each chapter: that is plainly not feasible for a book of this scale. In outline, REIS certainly does what a reader would expect from any such publication. The editor, with a small team of close colleagues, has assembled a roster of 139 authors from some 30 countries, ranging from senior scholars to recent PhDs, charged with distilling key insights into concise, accessible summaries. The resulting articles – over 200 in number – could never satisfy every possible reader in every possible respect, but represent a satisfyingly rich, robust and stimulating mix. They are alphabetically organised, and cover theoretical concepts and approaches (with themes such as ‘footing’ and ‘models’); the history of the field; modes of interpreting (e.g., familiar headline priorities such as ‘consecutive’ and ‘simultaneous’, as well as less predictable entries like ‘fingerspelling’ and ‘re-speaking’); interpreting settings; issues of process (e.g., ‘memory’, ‘explicitation’);

product and performance (e.g., ‘fluency’, ‘omissions’); professional issues (e.g., ‘working conditions’, ‘role’ and ‘ethics’); technology; interpreter education; research methodologies; and interpreting studies as a discipline (covering topics such as influential periodicals, institutions and figures). Within this impressive mix, it is wholly predictable that any reader will have their own favourite head-words and index entries, perceiving connections unmade and identifying what they believe to be ‘gaps’ in coverage. There will be quibbling over conference dinners and late-night bar-room ding-dongs – it’s what academics do for fun.

It is characteristic of Pöchhacker’s intellectual approach, though, that the idea of publishing an encyclopedia at this time would simply have remained on the drawing board had it not been for the emphasis he gave to generating and presenting the volume in a way that would add specific, innovative value to the academic landscape. In short, therefore, this volume aims to be no ordinary encyclopedia.

The editor’s introduction helps to explain the intentions here, and is required reading for anyone who wishes to extract maximum value from this publication. This is worth underlining: if you want your students to make the most of this book, tell them – ‘You know those pages numbered with Roman numerals that you usually skip? This time, start there.’ Pöchhacker focuses us on the point that an encyclopedia’s architecture is vital to fulfilling its purpose. In the case of REIS, the editorial intention has been to spin a true web of knowledge by designing a “fine-grained conceptual structure that allows the reader to zoom in and out, as it were, from central categories” (p. x). Fundamental to achieving this is the embedding of cross-references in the text, which assist the reader in ‘joining the dots’ between what might otherwise be disconnected notions. In essence, this Herculean task is the very one that Pöchhacker has made his own across the decades – recognising commonalities and seeing the bigger picture: synthesising to illuminate, integrating to invigorate. REIS is undoubtedly peerless in delivering such an outcome.

For this reviewer, then, as groundbreakingly good as this book already is, it is a matter of genuine excitement already to be able to look forward to the second edition of the encyclopedia. The web it is able to weave will surely be more robust, more intricate and greater in its span. This volume already anticipates improvements in the resolution of some of its own greatest challenges as a product. The vision is quite clear: the encyclopedia that Pöchhacker and, one assumes, the publisher ultimately envisage would permit forms of internal connectivity that naturally occur to the human mind and would not be bound to the architectural limitations imposed by paper-based publication, because any “future *online* version of the Encyclopedia would eliminate this inconvenience” (p. xi – reviewer’s emphasis). In this first edition, a certain chafing at the leash is evident, for example, in the absence of diagrams, tables and illustrations – the inclusion of such graphic material would be effectively unproblematic in an online encyclopedia. Similarly,

the value of the “multi-layered arrangement of headwords” (p. x) to which the editor here draws attention would be infinitely easier to signal and to exploit in the hyper-connected context of a web-based resource – whereas at present, clean and considered typography notwithstanding, the encyclopedia includes very different types and levels of entry whose relative significance is hard to discern on the page.

Other aspects of this volume perhaps fail fully to satisfy the reviewer for more traditional reasons. The adage that managing professional academics is ‘like trying to herd cats’ must surely never have sounded more true than for the editors of an encyclopedia. But there’s no way around this problem: it is simply impossible to make 139 authors write with one voice. Pöchhacker’s masterly textbook *Introducing Interpreting Studies* (2004) actually points up this contrast rather starkly: its clarity and consistency of tone, its tightly-woven coverage of the subject is not matched in this volume, and it is all but impossible to imagine how it ever could be. The result is, for instance, that whilst the encyclopedia seeks to ensure that “every article reflects an effort... to cover the headword, where applicable, across domains, modes and settings” (p. x), this target is not always fully attained, because not all contributors are likely to be aware of the penetration of their subject into every corner of every sub-field across the discipline.

Gallantly, the editorial introduction also excuses some contributors’ somewhat unhelpful excesses of self-referentiality – “the fact that these contributors thus describe, in large measure, their own work, or at least the line of work to which they have contributed, should ensure [...] an authoritative treatment of the topics covered” (p. xiii). Though of course we all like our work to be noticed, no intellectual contribution is an island, and to present it otherwise is to risk being disappointingly at odds with the target of augmenting connectivity within the field.

In addition, the editorial team has plainly had to reach a difficult decision about the capacity of the encyclopedia’s own bibliography (and its internal structure, which for this reviewer could be more helpful). The conclusion has evidently been to keep down the number of references by confining them in principle to published work: however, this guideline has been observed unevenly. As readers, we are left hugely reliant on the distillation inscribed by each author, and frequently lack onward advice to guide us into new territories in the literature, or are left uncertain of the status of sources.

An encyclopedia is an unusual academic beast. It is not required to say anything original. It is not required to present a single, coherent opinion or argument. It does not directly require consistent methodological empiricism. What readers value, rather, is its *reliability*. “Trust me,” it says, “I know this stuff inside out.” In this respect, despite the above critique, REIS is the easiest imaginable volume to endorse: devised and crafted with diligence and precision from start to finish, it is unique and will fill a readily identifiable hole on academic bookshelves around the globe.