

DISCOURSE MANAGEMENT AND RAPPORT-BUILDING: THE ROLE OF BACKCHANNELS IN REMOTE INTERPRETING



UZAKTAN ÇEVİRİDE SÖYLEM VE İLİŞKİ YÖNETİMİ: GERİBİLDİRİMLERİN ROLÜ

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ABSTRACT: This study explores the role of backchannels in remote interpreting settings, specifically their function in rapport-building among interlocutors. Previous literature has emphasized interpreters as active participants in meaning negotiation, but limited research exists on backchannels in remote contexts, where nonverbal cues are often restricted. A discourse analytical approach is adopted to examine the interplay between lexical and nonlexical backchannels in a 40-minute corpus obtained from an online business interview. The findings reveal that interpreters use backchannels strategically to maintain engagement and foster collaboration, compensating for the absence of visual cues such as facial expressions and gestures. The study highlights the importance of backchannels in remote interpreting, offering valuable insights into how interpreters manage communication dynamics and contribute to the construction of mutual understanding in such settings. The study also calls for further discourse-focused research to explore the role of backchannels in supporting smooth, collaborative exchanges by improving our understanding of their impact on communication dynamics and the role of the interpreter in managing these interactions.

Keywords: Discourse Management, Rapport-Building, Backchannels, Remote Interpreting, Business Meeting

ÖZ: Bu çalışma, uzaktan çeviri ortamlarında geribildirimlerin rolünü, özellikle muhataplar arasında yakınlık kurma işlevini incelemektedir. Alanyazında, sözlü çevirmenlerin anlam müzakeresinde etkin eyleyenler oldukları vurgulanmış, ancak dildışı göstergelerin genellikle kısıtlı olduğu uzaktan çeviri ortamlarında geri bildirimler üzerine yapılan araştırmalar sınırlı kalmıştır. Bu çalışmada, çevrimiçi bir iş görüşmesinden elde edilen 40 dakikalık bir derlemede sözcüksel ve sözcüksel olmayan geribildirimler arasındaki etkileşimi incelemek için söylem çözümlemesi yaklaşımı benimsenmiştir. Bulgular, sözlü çevirmenlerin, yüz ifadeleri ve jestler gibi görsel ipuçlarının yokluğunda etkileşimi sürdürebilmek ve işbirliğini teşvik edebilmek için geri bildirimleri stratejik bir şekilde kullandığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu çalışma, sözlü çevirmenlerin iletişimin devingen yapısını nasıl yönettiklerini ve bu tür ortamlarda karşılıklı anlayışın inşasına nasıl katkıda bulduklarını ortaya koyarak, uzaktan çeviride geri bildirimlerin önemine dikkat çekmektedir. Çalışma, ayrıca, iletişim dinamikleri üzerindeki etkilerini ve tercümanın bu etkileşimleri yönetmedeki rolünü anlamamızı geliştirerek, arka kanalların sorunsuz, işbirliğine dayalı alışverişleri desteklemedeki rolünü keşfetmek için söylem odaklı daha fazla araştırma yapılması çağrısında bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Söylem Yönetimi, İlişki Yönetimi, Geribildirimler, Uzaktan Çeviri, İş Toplantısı

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Introduction

Recent literature has demonstrated that interpreters are active participants in the negotiation of meaning, engaging in more than the mere transfer of utterances within a conversation (Pöchhacker, 2000; Angelelli, 2004; Nakane, 2009; Nartowska, 2015; Li et. al., 2023). Beyond linguistic transfer, interpreters actively shape ongoing discourse through a variety of semiotic resources, encompassing both verbal and nonverbal modalities. A key aspect of these communicative actions is *backchannels*—verbal and nonverbal signals that listeners use to convey engagement, comprehension, or emotional response without disrupting the flow of speech. These cues, produced by both the interpreter and other interlocutors, are critical in managing the dynamics of communication. However, there remains a gap in interpreting studies, particularly in remote contexts, as the role of backchannels and their impact on interaction have been explored in only a limited number of studies (Amato et. al., 2018; Hansen and Svennevig, 2021; de Boe et. al., 2024).

This study seeks to address this gap by investigating how backchannels function in a remote interpreting setting, with a specific focus on their role in facilitating rapport-building among interlocutors. The significance of this research stems from the fact that interpreters, although not the primary recipients of discourse, are often the first recipients of communication. Their responses to minimal verbal and nonverbal cues are pivotal in signalling reciprocity and fostering rapport, thereby facilitating connections between interlocutors. In remote interpreting, where access to nonverbal cues such as facial expressions and body language is often restricted, backchannels assume an even more critical role in managing discourse and establishing trust.

The primary objective of this study is to explore how interpreters' backchannels function within ongoing conversations and how they respond to backchannel cues from other participants. By analysing these interactions in remote interpreting settings, this research aims to elucidate the role of backchannels in rapport-building and communication management, particularly in contexts where nonverbal cues are constrained. Ultimately, the study intends to contribute to a deeper understanding of the interpreter's role in discourse management and rapport-building beyond the mere transfer of language.

1. Backchannels in Communication: Implications for (Un)mediated Discourse

The accessibility of interpreters at reduced costs, enabling communication between individuals who speak different languages and reside in distant locations, coupled with the flexibility of scheduling and reduced stress levels for interpreters, has significantly enhanced the viability of remote interpreting (Klammer and Pöchhacker, 2021: 2867).

These factors have created substantial opportunities for remote interpreting to expand and increasingly replace traditional on-site interpreting practices. However, despite advancements in the quality and accessibility of technology, interacting in technology-mediated environments requires significant adaptation from users, especially when the assistance of an interpreter is involved (Davitti and Braun, 2020: 279). These challenges are further complicated by interlocutors' limited access to semiotic resources, both verbal and nonverbal, which play a crucial role not only in the sense-making process but also in establishing and maintaining rapport. Among these resources are backchannels, a term first coined by Yngve (1970), which act as effective cues from the listener, "supporting the speaker's ongoing turn" (Mereu et al., 2024: 1) and facilitating the negotiation of meaning, thus enabling engagement and comprehension despite physical separation.

In monolingual speech activities, both interlocutors remain actively engaged, even when they do not hold the conversational floor. The current speaker's discourse is, to some extent, co-constructed by the listening party through the use of nonverbal and vocal signals. These signals serve multiple functions, such as demonstrating attention, expressing agreement, and, more importantly, facilitating conversational success by promoting mutual understanding and establishing rapport. Typically manifested as short utterances, these signals are collectively referred to as backchannels, a term preferred for its inclusivity. However, the literature offers various alternative terms for this phenomenon, including 'acknowledgment tokens' (Jefferson, 1984), 'listener responses' (Maynard, 1990), 'reactive tokens' (Clancy et al., 1996), and active listening responses (Simon, 2018). It is important to distinguish backchannels from interjections (Li, 2005), which convey emotions like surprise or excitement. Common interjections include "hey," "ouch," "oops," and "yippee." In contrast, backchannels are primarily linked to active listening, signalling attentiveness, encouraging the speaker to continue, and maintaining conversational flow. This distinction highlights the pragmatic role of backchannels in interaction compared to the emotive and spontaneous nature of interjections. Additionally, backchannels are contextually shaped by the primary speaker's discourse, whereas interjections function independently, expressing the emotional state of the interlocutor rather than responding directly to the speaker's input.

Backchannels, both verbal and nonverbal, are culturally situated and their forms and functions can vary significantly across languages and cultural contexts. Gardner's (2001) categorization provides a detailed account of the various forms and functions of backchannels that listeners generate, with examples drawn from spoken English discourse. In this categorization, apart from one type being nonlexical—*continuers*, like "mm hm" and "uh huh", which encourage the speaker to continue—the others consist of lexical items, which can vary in complexity from single words to multi-word phrases or even entire utterances, reflecting the varied ways

listeners actively participate in discourse. These lexical backchannels include *acknowledgments*, which indicate agreement or understanding, such as "mm" or "yeah"; *newsmakers*, responses that mark the prior turn as noteworthy, like "really?" or "right"; and *change-of-activity tokens*, which signal a shift in topic or activity, for example, "okay" or "alright." Additionally, there are *assessments*, evaluative responses to prior talk, such as "great" or "how intriguing"; *clarification questions*, which briefly inquire about mishearings or misunderstandings, like "who?", "which book?", or "huh?"; and *collaborative completions*, where the listener contributes by completing the speaker's utterance. Alongside these verbal backchannels, *nonverbal cues* also play a significant role in listener participation, including vocalizations or actions such as sighs, laughter, nods, or head shakes. Bjørge (2010: 193) is another researcher who suggests that backchannels can be lexical, phrasal, or syntactic, illustrating the variety in the length of these cues.

Backchannel markers in spoken Turkish discourse are particularly relevant to this study, as Turkish is one of the two languages examined in the corpus. Despite the importance of backchannels in conversational dynamics, research on their use in Turkish remains limited. Özcan (2015), for example, analysed the functions of the markers "evet" (yes) and "hı hı" (uh-huh) in Turkish discourse, identifying five primary functions: approval, agreement, continuation, question-response, and divergence. More recently, Kaynarpinar (2021) conducted a master's thesis investigating approval markers in Turkish through the lens of (im) politeness and speech act theories. This study identified several approval markers, such as "tabi," (sure/of course) "aynen," (exactly) "doğru," (that's right) "iyi," (good) and "kesinlikle," (definitely) shedding light on their diverse applications in conversational contexts. However, backchannels in Turkish may also function as negation markers; linguistic items such as "cık" (a sound of negation, often used to express disagreement) (Bal-Gezegin, 2013) and "yok" (no/not) (Altunay & Aksan, 2018) do not indicate agreement but rather signal disapproval, thus serving as negative backchannels. In addition, Ruhi (2013: 27) proposes in a study that explores the pragmatic functions of "tamam" (okay) and "peki," (alright) two generic backchannels in Turkish used for approval, that these markers may also "signal negatively evaluative propositions". These findings collectively emphasize the complexity and richness of backchannel and pragmatic markers in Turkish discourse, illustrating that these markers serve multifaceted purposes, encompassing both textual and interactional functions.

A verbal backchannel common in one language may correspond to a nonlexical cue or a simple nod in another, reflecting distinct interactional norms and cultural practices. Speakers may use backchannels in ways perceived as unconventional in other cultures, such as employing a response or nod even when they do not fully understand or agree with their interlocutor (Cutrone, 2005: 238). These cultural variations highlight the

importance of pragmatic awareness, particularly for interpreters in multilingual settings. Effective interpretation requires adapting backchannel use to align with the norms of both languages, ensuring clear communication and building cross-cultural rapport. In remote interpreting, where visual cues are often absent, backchannels become even more essential. Their role in maintaining engagement and fostering trust between speakers will be discussed in the next section.

2. Conceptualizing Rapport-Building: A theoretical Framework

Language serves a dual purpose: “exchanging information and managing rapport” (Wu et. al., 2020: 6). Rapport, a sense of harmony between individuals, is integral to communicative interactions, where the exchange of information is invariably accompanied by efforts to manage interpersonal connections. Rather than being a personal trait, rapport emerges through interaction with others and necessitates responsiveness. This interactional framework is reinforced by Kelly et al. (2013), who define rapport as a practical and collaborative relationship built on mutual understanding. Such a connection not only fosters interpersonal harmony but also facilitates the exchange of valuable information, making it essential for addressing challenges in communication and problem-solving.

Rapport management was initially developed as a theory by Spencer-Oatey (2000; 2008) to provide deeper insight into cross-cultural differences in the management of rapport within interactions. In Rapport Management Theory (henceforth RMT), rapport is described as the way “speakers express their feelings of harmony or discord, the smoothness or turbulence of interactions, and the warmth or hostility” in their relationships with others (2008: 35). Building on Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, RMT is based on three key components: *face sensitivities*, *social expectancies*, and *interactional goals*. RMT aligns with Politeness Theory in that both suggest that when a speaker contributes to a conversation, they consider the listener's social needs and desires (referred to as "face needs") and select their words accordingly to maintain positive social outcomes or avoid negative ones.

Rapport management theory differs from politeness theory in how it conceptualizes *face*. While politeness theory views face as a bi-dimensional construct of *positive and negative face* (concerns about approval and autonomy), RMT uses an "identity attributes" approach (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 14), where face is tied to claims about personal identity, such as status or competence. This means that in RMT, face-threatening situations arise when there is a mismatch between the identity attributes one claims and what is perceived by others, which can affect interpersonal rapport. In interpreter-mediated interactions, interlocutors' face needs are reflected in the interpreter's performance. This implies that the negotiation of participants' face concerns is, to some extent, dependent on the interpreter's

awareness of how to accurately represent the discursive actions participants employ to manage their face.

Social expectancies refer to the behavioural expectations people have based on established social roles, norms, and protocols. These expectations arise from the roles participants occupy, such as in professional or personal settings, where individuals feel entitled to certain behaviours and believe others are obliged to act accordingly. When these expectations are violated, it can lead to offense. Spencer-Oatey (2008: 16) identifies two key socio-interactive principles underlying these expectations: equity, which involves fairness and balance in interactions, and autonomy-imposition, which concerns the extent to which individuals are controlled or imposed upon. Understanding these principles is particularly important in interpreter-mediated interactions, as assuming roles beyond their responsibilities or neglecting their own can disrupt the exchange and harm rapport, emphasizing the necessity of clearly defined role boundaries.

The third component of rapport management is *interactional goals*. Spencer-Oatey (2000; 2002; 2008) posits that individuals often approach interactions with specific goals, which may be task-oriented or relationship-focused, depending on the context and power dynamics. These goals are negotiated through discursive means, and failure to meet them can lead to offence, disrupting the balance of rapport. In interpreter-mediated settings, the negotiation of these goals often depends on the interpreter's performance. Successful mediation of these discursive processes is vital for maintaining rapport, with the effective management of backchannels in interpreter-mediated settings being one of the key components.

All in all, RMT views rapport as a dynamic, interactive process shaped by various factors, such as context, activity type, participant relationships, and social roles (Cavents et al., 2025). This focus on the interplay between interpersonal dynamics and communication aligns closely with the flexible and evolving nature of interpreting. By breaking the process down into three core components—*face sensitivities*, *social expectancies*, and *interactional goals*—RMT provides a framework to better understand interpreters' decision-making processes. The theory highlights how interpreters' choices in managing rapport are often context-dependent and may shift throughout the interaction. Applying RMT allows for a deeper exploration of these shifts, particularly in terms of how interpreters use strategies like backchannels to foster rapport and ensure effective communication in remote interpreting settings.

3. Data Collection and Methodology

This study investigates the role of backchannel cues in the context of remote interpreting to build and maintain rapport. The data used for this analysis consists of a 40-minute video recording of a business interview mediated by a remote interpreter. The interpreter is a graduate of the interpreting and translation department with two years of experience in the

field. The interlocutors include an American typewriter collector of Japanese origin, who is also an academic and runs a YouTube channel, and a typewriter repair expert from Turkey, who collects, repairs, and sells typewriters. For ethical reasons, the names of the participants have been anonymised in the analysis. Consent for the recording was obtained orally at the beginning of the encounter, with participants informed that the recording might be used for educational or publishing purposes. Written consent was subsequently obtained through electronic means.

In line with ethical considerations, ethical clearance was sought from the Institute of Turkic Studies at Marmara University, and the recording was submitted to the Institute for review. This micro-analytical case study uses the video recording, which was transcribed following conventions developed by Yilmaz¹ (2012) to accurately represent the dynamic verbal and nonverbal structures of spoken Turkish discourse in writing. A new symbol, '[...]', has been incorporated into the transcription conventions outlined by Yilmaz to indicate omitted long sequences of talk deemed irrelevant to the analysis. As the study is conducted in English, Turkish utterances in the conversation are backtranslated into English, with the backtranslated content presented in italics for ease of reading and to preserve fidelity to the original utterances.

The following section presents extracts from the entire conversation, with boundaries set to include the full negotiation of meaning, ensuring no significant verbal or nonverbal influence on the selected co-enunciative situations is omitted. In these extracts, no categorization is made regarding the various forms or functions of backchannels in relation to rapport-building. Additionally, the analysis does not distinguish who generates the backchannels, whether it is the interpreter or one of the two primary interlocutors. This is because there are no clear boundaries in the interaction, as backchannels are mutually used by all participants, with the backchannels of all three interlocutors embedded within the same interactional context, making such categorization difficult.

4. Case Study Analysis: Rapport-Building through Backchannels

This section explores how backchannels contribute to rapport-building by analysing video-recorded extracts from a remote interpreting session, drawing on Rapport Management Theory to emphasize the importance of addressing face needs, relational alignment, and interactional harmony.

Abbreviations: I: *Interpreter* / **C:** *Collector* / **RS:** *Repair Specialist*

Extract 1.

C1- my name is (.) as you can see [showing it with his hand] it is uh P(...) D(...) R(...) and um I'm originally from San Francisco # however right now I'm based in Tokyo Japan ##

¹ See Appendix

I1- ee aşağıda gördüğünüz gibi ismim P(...) D(...) R(...) ee aslen San Francisco ama şu an Tokyoda yaşıyorum
as you can see below my name is P (...) D (...) R(...) I am originally from San Francisco but right now living in Tokyo

RS1- ## tamam [inviting to continue]
ok

I2- <yeah

C2- <um # okay # and [...]

The conversation begins with the collector's self-introduction (C1), which not only orients the interaction but also positions the collector as the initiator, giving him control over how the conversation unfolds. By starting with a self-introduction, the collector determines both the opening of the dialogue and the direction it will take, signalling his agency in shaping the interaction. The collector's phrase "as you can see," accompanied by a hand gesture, serves to visually direct attention to his name, emphasizing his effort to ensure clarity and establish a shared point of reference. However, the completion of his turn is not explicitly marked, leading to a brief pause before the interpreter responds. The interpreter omits the hand gesture and offers only a verbal translation (I1).

The repair specialist then uses "tamam" as a backchannel to signal comprehension and invite the collector to continue (RS1), with the interpreter rendering this backchannel as "yeah," a nonlexical equivalent that sustains the flow of conversation (I2). The interpreter does not render the collector's own backchannel, "okay," (C2) which can be seen as a strategic decision to maintain neutrality. By omitting this backchannel, the interpreter allows the repair specialist's backchannel to take precedence, focusing on comprehension and interaction rather than unnecessary verbal feedback.

In conversation openings, where participants are unfamiliar with each other, backchannels are particularly crucial in fostering rapport. The interpreter's selective treatment of backchannels—substituting "tamam" with "yeah" and omitting "okay"—helps maintain a collaborative atmosphere and ensures the conversation remains focused on mutual understanding. These choices reflect the interpreter's effort in aligning interactional goals to facilitate supportive communication, which is essential for building rapport in a remote interpreting context.

Extract 2.

C1- I'm trying right now (.) I'm trying to uhhh (.) *I have a* youtube channel and in this youtube channel # I want to introduce about umm my life in Japan # photography and more recently about %typewriter% culture

I1- ihm şu an benim bir yutu(be)p kanalım var ve utube kanalımda aslen (.)
right now I have a utube channel and in my utube channel basically in fact

aslında eee Japonyada hayat # ee fotoğrafçılık %ve% ee daktilo kültürü
about life in Japan photography and typewriting culture I am
hakkında vid(eo)yolar yapıyorum
making videos

RS1- ## tamam {yes}
okay

C2- [nodding his head] okay %{yeah}% [interpreter remaining silent] and so [...]

The exchange begins with the collector (C1) introducing his current endeavour of managing a YouTube channel and explaining its content focus, including typewriter culture. The interpreter (I1) provides a faithful rendition of the collector's utterance, preserving both the structure and the intended meaning. Following this, there is a brief pause during which the repair specialist (RS1) employs two lexical backchannels: "tamam" in Turkish and "yes" in English. The repair specialist's choice to use a bivalent term like "yes," which carries universal agreement and confirmation value, reflects an effort to streamline communication by addressing the collector directly in his native language. This strategic move eliminates the need for the interpreter to mediate this specific turn, thereby minimizing disruptions in the flow of the conversation. By using a term that bridges linguistic boundaries, the repair specialist positions the collector as the primary interlocutor while maintaining smooth interaction.

The collector responds with a nod and two consecutive backchannels, "okay" and "yeah," signalling comprehension and readiness to continue (C2). During this sequence, the interpreter remains silent, momentarily stepping out of the engagement framework. This deliberate non-intervention allows the interlocutors to establish direct rapport and co-construct the interaction. The interpreter's non-rendition of the backchannels demonstrates her understanding of the interactional requirements. While interpreters typically render backchannels to ensure mutual understanding, the interpreter here chooses to prioritize the natural flow of communication. Her non-rendition fosters a collaborative atmosphere, enabling the interlocutors to align their turns and work toward a shared conversational purpose without additional mediation.

The use of bivalent terms, despite their universal recognition, can carry culturally specific nuances, which could require the interpreter's mediation to ensure accurate interpretation. Besides, the interpreter's silence could be viewed as a potential threat to her professional role, as it risks diminishing her visibility in the interaction. By refraining from intervention, the interpreter enables direct engagement between participants, thereby reinforcing the collaborative nature of the interaction and demonstrating adaptability to the dynamics of remote interpreting.

Extract 3.

C1- when I saw your %shop% I thought it is quite interesting that uh # uhh you know in twenty twenty two # you know uh you are selling uhh uhh *typewriters* # and other # antiques

I1- umm dükkanınıza baktığımda ee iki bin yirmi ikide hala ee anti%ka& when I look at shop in twenty twenty two I see that you are still selling

daktilo sattığınızı gördüm
antique typewriters

RS1- doğrudur (!)
that's right

I2- yeah that's <true

RS2- <ben> hem tamirat # restü(ö)rasyon [collector nodding] ve
I both repair and restore and

satışını yapıyorum
sell them

I3- um I am also maintaining them # selling them and uhmm # destürasyon ne oluyo(r) (?)
what is destürasyon

RS2- restü(ö)rasyon # tamirat bakım diyebilirsiniz
restoration you can say repair maintenance

I4- ah yeah # restoring them

C2- yeah # fixing [showing it with hands] okay

The repair specialist's initial response, "doğrudur," functions as an acknowledgment of the collector's statement, signaling agreement and affirming the shared understanding (RS1). This creates a foundation of alignment between the interlocutors, which is further reinforced by the interpreter's quick rendition of the response (I2). As the repair specialist continues with a post-rheme explanation about his work, the initial acknowledgment evolves into a more detailed elaboration (RS2). This shift highlights how backchannels can transition from simple affirmations to more substantive contributions, providing additional context. While the interpreter initially assumes the turn has ended, this extended backchannel reflects the specialist's investment in the interaction, enriching the dialogue.

The interpreter's request for clarification regarding the term "restorasyon," combined with the specialist's willingness to explain the term and offer alternative expressions, demonstrates a cooperative approach (I3; RS2). This process not only supports the interpreter in her role but also strengthens the interpersonal dynamic by emphasizing a shared commitment to clear and accurate communication. The interpreter's subsequent response, incorporating the clarification into her rendition, reaffirms her role in facilitating comprehension. The collector's collaborative backchannel response, marked by the word "fixing" and an

accompanying hand gesture, functions as a repair mechanism, contributing to and completing the speaker's utterance to refine the interpreter's rendition (C2). While this utterance sidesteps the repair specialist and could potentially challenge the interpreter's professional face, it also emphasizes the collaborative nature of the interaction. Verbal backchannels and nonverbal cues such as nodding demonstrate attentiveness and encourage further dialogue, reflecting the participants' collective effort to build rapport.

Extract 4.

C1- is it ok if this um if this interview (.) if I upload onto Utube (?)

I1- um bu röportajı Utube'a yüklersem ee sizing için uygun mu (?)
is it okay if I upload this interview onto Utube

RS1- sıkıntı yok
no problem

I2- it's no problem [collector nodding in approval]

RS2- röportajı (.) röportajı kaydediyo(r) galiba di(eğ)il mi (?) {zaten}
the interview I think it is recording the interview isn't it

I3- evet
yes

RS3- ben de kaydetmeye çalıştım da (.) *ben de* paylaşmak isterim ##
I also tried to record it I want to share it as well

<bana> da gönderirsin
you send it to me as well

I4- <size size de gönderirim
I'll send it to you as well

RS4- tamam [collector gazing curiously]
okay

I5- I'll share the # recording also with him

C2- fantastic (!) great (!) okay

The collector's initial inquiry about uploading the interview to YouTube demonstrates a direct yet polite approach (C1), setting the stage for the interpreter to render the question accurately to the repair specialist (I1). The specialist's brief, affirmative response, "sıkıntı yok" (no problem), conveys his approval in a straightforward manner (RS1), and the interpreter efficiently relays this sentiment to the collector in alignment with the specialist's tone (I2).

As the exchange progresses, the interpreter and the specialist briefly engage in a sub-conversation about the recording and its potential sharing. This interaction temporarily excludes the collector from the participatory framework (RS2; I2; RS3; I4; RS4). The collector's gaze, used as a nonverbal cue, signals his intention to be reintegrated into the conversation. In response, the interpreter chooses not to render the entire sub-conversation

but instead succinctly informs the collector that she will share the recording with the specialist, addressing his implied concern for inclusion (I5).

The collector's evaluative response—expressed through positive affirmations like "fantastic" and "great"—functions as a backchannel to a prior statement rather than contributing to the main conversational thread (C2). The interpreter, recognizing these responses as side remarks with interactionally negotiated value, opts not to render them. This decision aligns with patterns observed in other sequences within the corpus, where the interpreter tends to omit or condense consecutive evaluative responses, deeming them non-essential to the core interaction.

Overall, this exchange highlights the interpreter's skill in managing conversational dynamics, balancing inclusivity, and selectively filtering content to maintain relevance and coherence in the interaction.

Extract 5.

RS1- aslında şöyle eee kendime özel ayırdığım (.) yani bi(r) koleksiyonum
it is in fact I don't have a private collection set aside for myself

yok %ama şöyle% ee ayırdığım ee eski # şairler ve yazarların ismi yazan (.)
but the ones I've set aside are related to old poets and writers

yani kullandığı daktilolar ile alakalı (.) yani ee özel koleksiyonum di(eğ)il
I mean the typewriters they used_I mean it's not my private collection

ama kenarda tuttuğum makineler var # aldığım gibi duruyo(r)lar #
but I have some machines set aside they're just as I received them

restürasyonlarını yapmadım # satışa da koymadım ayırdım {kenara}
I haven't restored them or put them up for sale I've set them aside

I1- um right now I don't have a personal (...) yet um %but% I have some machines that I um keep and I still didn't make their restorations I just keep them # and they have some special um poets or writers name on it [collector showing surprise with his mouth] and I want to keep them # {for now}

C1- [nodding head with amazement] wow wow # okay # these are Turkish writers and poets (?)

I2- Türk yazarlar ve şairler (.) şairleri miydi (?)
were they Turkish writers and poets

RS2- evet (!)
yes

I3- yes (!) [with emphasis]

C2- wow (!) cool okay # {interesting}

I4- çok ilginç
very interesting

The interpreter's incorporation of the detail that the machines are kept specifically for their association with poets and writers takes the collector by surprise, as evidenced by his nonverbal cues—his lips curl and

he maintains a focused expression while continuing to nod his head (I1; C1). These gestures function as nonverbal backchannels, displaying his reciprocity and engagement in the conversation. Since the interpreter is already engaged in rendering the primary participant's utterances, she is not expected to mediate these nonverbal moves, as they fall outside her verbal translation role.

After the interpreter's rendition (I1), the collector expresses his amazement through three consecutive backchannels: two evaluative responses followed by a change-of-activity token to signal a shift in topic (C1). As the conversation moves forward, the interpreter omits the evaluative backchannels and focuses solely on rendering the question that marks the shift in topic (I2). Nonverbal cues, such as the collector's surprised mouth gesture, play a significant role here, as they alone effectively convey the collector's emotional reaction, compensating for the absence of evaluative backchannels.

When the collector asks whether the typewriters belonged to Turkish poets and writers, the specialist provides a decisive "yes," (RS2) which the interpreter renders without delay (I3). Following this, the collector once again produces four consecutive backchannels (C2). As is typical throughout the corpus, the interpreter renders only the last of these—an evaluative response—while omitting the others (I4). This selective rendering demonstrates the interpreter's strategy of prioritizing relevant content, reflecting a consistent approach in managing the flow of conversation and maintaining the focus on the core discussion. By omitting extraneous backchannels, the interpreter helps maintain the momentum of the conversation, ensuring that the interaction stays on track, which in turn fosters an effective communication dynamic that supports rapport building between the participants.

5. Findings and Concluding Remarks

In three-party interactions, where meaning is co-constructed by all interlocutors through the mediation of an interpreter, increased emphasis is placed on directly accessible features such as eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, postures, and prosody. These elements, alongside verbal and nonverbal backchannels, play a critical role in signalling reciprocity, fostering mutual understanding, and building rapport among participants (Merlini, 2015: 103). However, as Davitti and Braun (2020: 288) have demonstrated, the effectiveness of these multimodal strategies, so vital in face-to-face interactions, may diminish in remote interpreting settings, where physical and visual cues are often constrained.

Cavent et. al's (2025) interactional data further highlights that interpreters in remote settings adapt by employing multimodal resources to manage rapport and using verbal strategies to compensate for the limited access to nonverbal communication. The findings of the current study align with this, showing that when interpreters omit evaluative backchannels and

focus solely on rendering the recipient's new utterance, nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions or gestures, take on a pivotal role in conveying emotional reactions and compensating for the absence of verbal backchannels.

The findings of the current study are consistent with those of Braun and Davitti (2018) in emphasizing the critical role of the opening phase in interpreter-mediated interactions, particularly in remote settings where establishing rapport and managing face-work pose unique challenges. Braun and Davitti (2018) highlight the importance of interpreters facilitating the transition to the remote mode and setting ground rules for the interaction. In contrast, the current study focuses on the nuanced use of backchannels as a key strategy for rapport-building. By selectively substituting or omitting certain backchannels, the interpreter demonstrates a deliberate effort to create a collaborative atmosphere and maintain mutual understanding. These findings complement Braun and Davitti's by shedding light on how the interpreter's careful management of linguistic and interactional resources contributes to fostering rapport during the crucial meet-and-greet phase in remote interpreting contexts.

The research also partially supports the findings of Amato et al. (2018). While Amato et al. suggest that interpreters may prioritize eliciting specific factual information at the expense of rapport-building, this study demonstrates that interpreters' selective treatment of backchannels—substituting or omitting them when considered as side remarks—aims to build a collaborative atmosphere by keeping the conversation focused. This suggests that interpreters can balance clarity and rapport-building, challenging the notion that these goals are mutually exclusive in mediated interactions.

The findings of this study and those of de Boe et al. (2024) reveal key differences in the treatment of backchannels by interpreters. The current study suggests that backchannels signalling comprehension and readiness to continue are often omitted by the interpreter, reflecting a tendency to focus on the main discourse. On the other hand, de Boe et al. (2024) report that one-word confirmation backchannels, which signal the beginning of a new turn, are never rendered, regardless of whether the recipient confirms understanding after the interpreter's rendition. This difference highlights that while both studies observe the omission of certain backchannels, the specific types of backchannels and their functions in the interaction vary across contexts, suggesting different interactional priorities and strategies employed by interpreters in each study.

This study highlights how interpreters selectively omit or substitute backchannels to manage rapport, maintain clarity, and foster collaboration, especially in remote settings with limited nonverbal cues. It also calls for further discourse-oriented research to explore the role of backchannels in supporting smooth, collaborative exchanges, enhancing our understanding

of their impact on communication dynamics and the interpreter's role in managing these interactions.

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Appendix

Transcription conventions

"#"- Pauses

"(.)"- Unfulfilled sentences

"(...)"- Incomprehensible sentence fragments

"eee"- Hesitation

"{ xxx }"- Post-rhematic structures

"[xxx]"- Extra-linguistic features

"< xxx >"- Overlapping talk

"% xxx %"- Stressed syllables or words

"*xxx*" - Pronounced more quickly compared to other parts of the discourse

" _____ "- An underlined phrase pronounced with an emphatic tone

"[...]"-Omitted long sequences of talk deemed irrelevant

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