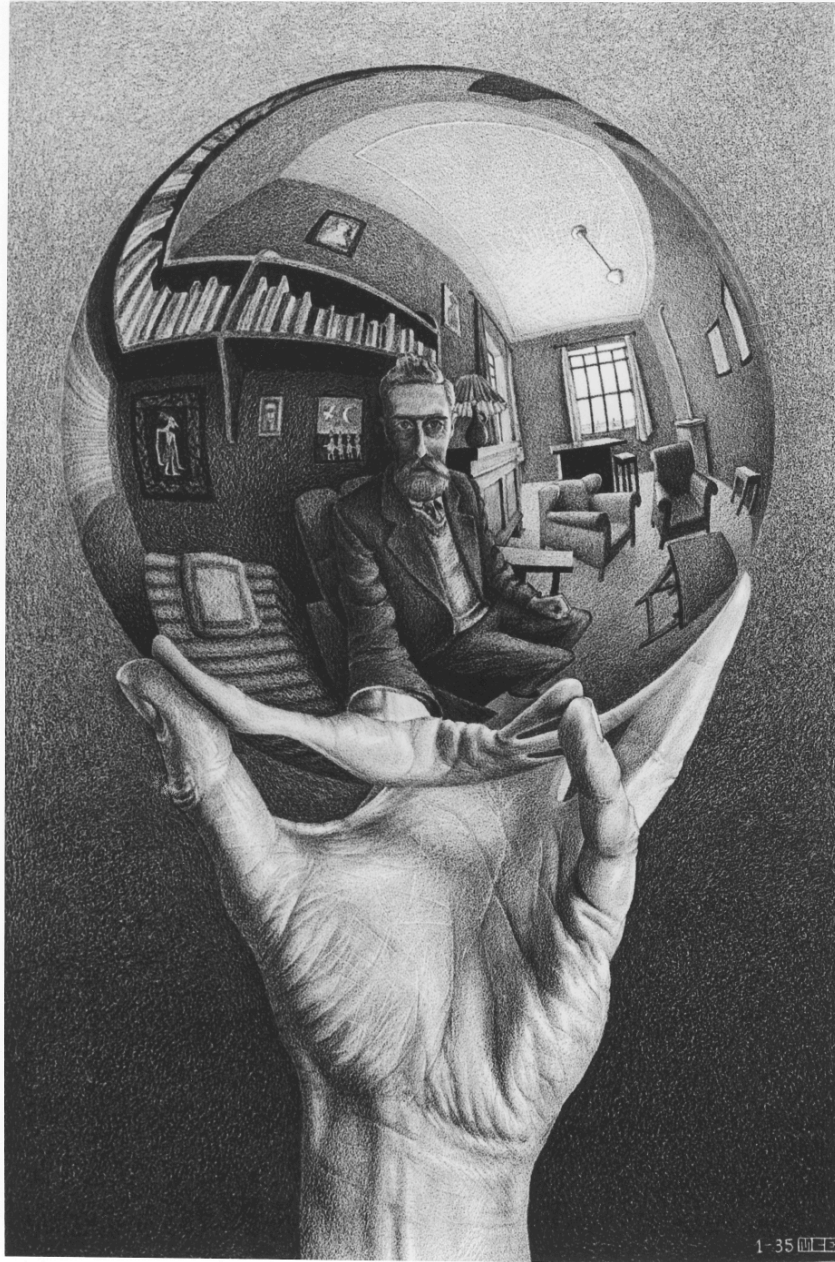


# The Rasmus & Timoth Dialogues

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M.C. Escher's "*Hand with Reflecting Sphere*" (1935)

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# *The Rasmus & Timoth Dialogues*

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## *“Meta-Dialogue”*

Phaedrus and Timoth entered the grand hallway. Phaedrus gazed at Timoth with admiration. “Well, Timoth, you have graduated from our training and now through Zeno’s generosity you will enjoy quite a productive residency through the guidance of Rasmus.”

Timoth smiled as they approached the doorway, “I hope I live up to everyone’s expectations.”

Inside, Rasmus and Zeno were looking toward the doorway. Zeno smiled as Timoth and Phaedrus entered the room. “Good afternoon Phaedrus. Good afternoon Timoth. It’s good to see the two of you again.” Zeno gestured for Timoth and Rasmus to step toward each other, “Rasmus, this is your new Apprentice, Timoth. Timoth, your assigned Mentor, Rasmus.”

Timoth and Rasmus shook hands and exchanged greetings.

Rasmus placed a hand on Timoth’s shoulder, “You will do well. Just trust yourself and always seek to learn a new thing each day. You have already taught yourself well through Phaedrus’ training, now you will continue to teach yourself through your own experiences.”

Timoth’s eyebrows furrowed, “What do you mean that I taught myself well through Phaedrus’ training?”

Phaedrus stepped forward, “Rasmus refers to the eternal truth of education: No mind can force another to learn... true learning can only come from within the mind that learns. We present the information, the challenges, the guidance; but you, Timoth, you and your classmates are the ones who must choose to learn from these things.”

Zeno addressed Timoth directly, “And here we recognize that a transitional time is needed to bring the graduate into full capability as a Server. We look forward to your time with us, Timoth. When you have completed your time here as an Apprentice, we will review your progress and personal goals. Many of our Apprentices continue on with us as Independent Servers and some become Mentors themselves.”

# *The Rasmus & Timothy Dialogues*

Timothy glanced down, "Well, it's going to be a long time before that ever happens to me."

Rasmus laughed while reaching toward a nearby table and picked up the book lying there. "Timothy, here is your handbook. I think you will find it very helpful as you spend time with us here."

Timothy glanced at the cover, "The Interpreting Handbook," then opened it, flipped through several pages, returned to the table of contents and then flipped through more pages. "Hmm... I see the author uses dialogues at the beginning of each chapter. Why is that?"

Rasmus nodded, "It is based on the ancient principles of Socrates and Plato, which have been implemented by numerous authors since that time. The author uses dialogues to introduce concepts to the reader in a more casual way before exploring them in depth during the rest of each chapter."

Timothy pointed a finger at a page in the book, "But this one character seems always to be asking questions. Doesn't that character know anything?"

"Of course, but the inquisitive character needs some guidance to understand that the answers to the questions are already in the character's mind."

"Well, that makes sense. Of course! A person has to have some knowledge of the topic to ask the question in the first place. That sort of pins down which pieces are understood and which need more thought... hmm!"

Rasmus smiled. "And so I see we have already established a good beginning. I will see you tomorrow morning in my office."

Timothy and Rasmus shook hands. Rasmus departed as Phaëdrus and Timothy exited Zeno's office. Timothy smiled while looking at Phaëdrus "Thanks for getting me here. I'll do my best."

"Doing your best is what got you here in the first place."

# *The Rasmus & Timoth Dialogues*

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## *“Communication”*

Rasmus took a step back from the artwork hanging on the wall. “What does this say to you?”

Timoth glanced up from the theory book. “What does what say to me?”

“This print by M.C. Escher. I just bought it at the store. I love the way Escher draws us into his world. See how the globe reflects the hand that is holding it? But we also see the image of the person attached to the hand as he looks at the globe and we also see the room he’s in: the object, the person, and the physical surroundings. And here we are observing all of it, understanding it on our own terms, within our own physical surroundings. In fact, the print itself is part of our physical surroundings now.”

“What are you talking about? It’s just a piece of artwork. Sure, it’s interesting, but it doesn’t ‘say’ anything to me.”

“Ah, Timoth. You see the world but you do not understand it. Here is an opportunity to reflect on your chosen field of work as an interpreter; but you refuse to learn from it. You see the object and yet you ignore it. How will you make your own progress if you do not incorporate the progress made by others before you?”

Timoth placed a marker in the book and closed it. “Now wait a minute. I thought we were talking about your new piece of artwork. How does a piece of art help me to become a better interpreter? Are you trying to tell me that Escher was an interpreter?”

“In a sense, yes. He understood the world around him and documented his perspectives in his art with the understanding that others would then interact with his work.”

“Interact? It’s just a print: it’s ink and paper. How can I interact with a document?”

“What’s that thing in your hands right there?”

## *The Rasmus & Timothy Dialogues*

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"This? This is my book, 'The Interpreting Handbook'. What does this have to do with art?"

"Does the book speak to you in any way? Does it communicate anything to you?"

"Well, it's not exactly an audio book, if that's what you mean. But it's giving me information about the profession of interpreting... so, yes, I guess it communicates useful information."

"So a book can communicate to you. But who is doing the communication?"

"Who is doing the communication? Um... well, I'm the one reading it."

"Yes, and I hope you keep on reading; but still, communication requires two. Who is communicating with you?"

"You mean the author?"

"Sure... the author. But the author is not in this room, is he?"

"Well, no, of course not. But his work – this book – is in the room."

"And that work 'speaks' to you in some way?"

"Sometimes it does... sometimes I'm not quite sure what he's getting at. What are *you* getting at?"

"My point is that we communicate in different ways. What we do, how we do it, how we arrange our physical settings, the books we read, the art we look at, the things we create. Everything about us communicates something to everyone we encounter. Even if they encounter the things we have created years later, we continue to communicate even to people we will never meet."

"So, in other words, everything communicates something to us, even if we don't know the creator?"

"Well put. Now, keep on reading."

# *The Rasmus & Timothy Dialogues*

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## *“Language”*

Timothy entered the room and blurted out “Isn’t it just a matter of formality?”

Rasmus looked up from the dictionary on the reading stand. “Isn’t *what* just a matter of formality?”

“This ‘register’ business everyone gets so worked up about. Wouldn’t it be easier to just say whether something was formal or informal?”

“Of course it would be easier; but it would also be terribly inaccurate.” Rasmus reached for a book on the top shelf. “Here, see this book? It lists hundreds of professional fields and identifies the requirements of each.” Rasmus placed the book on the desk, opened it, and continued, “Here near the beginning is ‘Architecture’, near the middle is ‘Medicine’, and at the end is ‘Zoology’.”

Timothy sat down at the desk across from Rasmus. “I’ll bet there’s a point to all of this somewhere... I can just feel it.”

“Yes, there is. Think of your average informal conversation on the street. Now, how would people in the fields I just mentioned communicate differently with their fellow peers on the job?”

“Well, they would likely use some specific vocabulary like ‘I-beam,’ or ‘scalpel,’ or ‘invertebrate’... stuff like that.”

“Yes, they are all likely to have different special vocabularies, although the medicine folks are likely to overlap a bit with the zoology folks. But suppose a group of zoologists went out for lunch at a restaurant. Would they talk to each other in the same way as they did at work?”

Timothy gazed out the window, hoping to see if any zoologists were outside. “I don’t know.”

“Well, you were the one who brought up the ‘formal’ versus ‘informal’ dichotomy. Wouldn’t you consider the work place more formal and the restaurant less formal?”

# *The Rasmus & Timothy Dialogues*

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"I suppose it depends on which restaurant they go to," said Timothy, with a laugh.

"Aha! So the physical environment might actually make a difference in how they communicate? Suppose two zoologists are talking at work and their supervisor comes in. Would their manner of communication change at all?"

Timothy desperately wanted a zoologist or two to slip into the room at this moment. "Well, I suppose it might depend on what they were talking about before the supervisor came in and whether the supervisor was going to join that conversation or tell them to get back to their zoology." Timothy decided a smile might be better than a laugh this time.

"Well, done!" said Rasmus. "You've backed into the third variable: Topic. What the conversation is about might influence how it is discussed."

"Third variable? What were the other two?"

Rasmus held out three fingers and pointed to each in turn: "First you have the physical setting, second you have the participants themselves along with their relative status, and third you have the topic of their discussion."

Timothy extended the same three fingers and pointed silently to each. "So just three variables? Is it really that easy?"

Rasmus smiled. "I'm glad you are starting to consider these things easy. Yes, three primary variables; but also how the communication took place: writing, signing, speaking, shouting, etc. That's the fourth and final variable to what we call 'Register'."

"So formality can't exist without all four of these factors. Formality is only the tip of the iceberg. It's not that register is a matter of formality, but that formality is a matter of register!"

"By George, I think you've got it!"

# *The Rasmus & Timoth Dialogues*

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## *“Language Use”*

Timoth flipped through several pages in the book. “Pragmatics and Discourse... I don’t get it.”

Rasmus put several papers in a drawer and closed it, then turned toward Timoth and said “Happy Birthday!”

Timoth stared at Rasmus for a moment and finally said, “My birthday is two months away. Why are you wishing me ‘happy birthday’ today?”

“Wishing? I’m not wishing anything. I just said two words: ‘happy’ and ‘birthday’. Why would you infer that I meant anything more than a list of two vocabulary items?”

Timoth’s jaw dropped about an inch. Closing the book and fixing eye-gaze to Rasmus, Timoth said, “You can’t be serious... a list of vocabulary items? What’s the point of that?”

Rasmus smiled and leaned further back in the chair, waiting for Timoth to calm down.

Timoth stood, “You make me work too hard!” and then began to pace back and forth in front of Rasmus’ desk. “OK... So I hear the words ‘happy birthday’ and I assume you are wishing me a happy birthday; but you say you are only listing two words.”

“Keep going.”

Timoth stopped pacing, and glaring at Rasmus said, “Meaning... meaning is something that each person’s mind determines, so I determined the meaning of a “wish” while you CLAIM to be only intending to “list.”

“So far, so good...”

Timoth walked to the chair and sat down. “The book says that pragmatics deals with people’s communication goals and intentions, but also with the effects and results that are achieved by the communication.”



## The Rasmus & Timoth Dialogues

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Rasmus smiled.

"I don't understand. People saying 'happy birthday' are generally *wishing* that to the people they say it to. But you say it was only a list of two words. I can't figure it out." Timoth's head sank into cupped hands.

Rasmus leaned forward. "And you believed me when I said I was making a list?"

Timoth looked up at Rasmus. "You were lying?"

Rasmus leaned back. "Did I say I was lying?"

Timoth sighed and leaned back in the chair, gazing at the ceiling. "Why do you do this to me? OK. Hmm. You said you were making a list but your *intention* was for me to think about my problem – pragmatics. Saying 'happy birthday' is a culturally accepted way to wish someone a happy birthday. It is very unlikely that you would simply rattle off a list of two words for no reason, so your goal or intention was clearly to make me think about intention and goals."

"Almost there!"

"Almost?! I thought I was done!"

"You asked me if I was lying. I *never said* that I had lied", said Rasmus, with a grin.

"No. But through pragmatics I understood that you *had* lied because I knew that you really were not just making a list but saying 'happy birthday' to force me to think about pragmatics. And then you asked me a question in return... 'Did I say I was lying?' I understood that to be a denial. But you didn't *directly* deny that you lied. So pragmatics allows us to read between the lines and understand a person's true intentions?"

"Congratulations!"

Timoth smiled. "I guess that means that I got it right!"

# *The Rasmus & Timoth Dialogues*

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## *“Language Variation”*

Rasmus looked closely at Timoth and said, “You’re serious?”

Timoth repeated, “Yes, he was signing English.”

“Surely you mean fingerspelling!?”

“No. *Signing* English.”

“There is no such thing as signing English! You can write it or speak it. You can encode the writing with Braille, fingerspelling, semaphore, Morse, typed text, or squiggly lines on paper. You can encode the speaking with cues or various combinations of the larynx, tongue, and oral cavity. But there is no way to *sign* any *spoken* language.”

“I saw him doing it.”

“Tell me *exactly* what you saw.”

Timoth went into the best detail possible. Signs and sign pieces that could be matched to English syntax. Mouth movement patterns that matched English words.

Rasmus looked Timoth in the eye again. “So what makes you think all of that was English?”

Timoth answered, “Because I could hear English in my head. It made sense to me and it didn’t look like the signing we see here in the community.”

“Did it ever occur to you that you know English?”

“What do you mean? Of course I know English. What has that to do with anything?”

## *The Rasmus & Timoth Dialogues*

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Rasmus smiled. "You, Timoth, have used your native-language knowledge to process another person's communication output. You saw some similarities in syntax and you came to the conclusion that his communication output was the same as one of your native languages."

"You mean it wasn't English?"

"He has no more ability to *sign* English than you or I are able to *speak* OSL!"

"Well if it wasn't English, then what was it?"

"Timoth, you have much to learn about variety in languages. You recognized the signs, yes?"

"Of course. If I hadn't understood the signs, how could I have communicated with him?"

"And what language do the signs come from, Our Sign Language or English?"

Timoth fingerspelled "O-S-L"

"Communication is easy, Timoth. Language is hard. An ape can communicate, but the only primates to ever acquire or learn a language are called humans. That doesn't mean that we *always* use language to communicate, but it does give us the edge."

Timoth stared at the ground for a moment, then looked at Rasmus, "You mean that he wasn't using any language at all?"

Rasmus laughed. "How am I supposed to know? You met one person. Are there others who share his communication system? Is it orderly and rule-governed? What is its history? Until we know the answers to these questions it is not possible to determine whether you saw language or merely communication."

Timoth smiled and looked at Rasmus. "So you don't know all the answers!"

"No, Timoth. But I do know many of the questions."

# *The Rasmus & Timoth Dialogues*

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## *“Language Encoding Systems”*

Timoth’s eyes looked up from the book and toward Rasmus “Encoding systems... does that mean secret codes?” Happily Rasmus replied, “Maybe you don’t realize that the question you just asked used an encoding system.” In disbelief, Timoth asked, “All communication uses encoding systems?” Timoth’s eyes closed as Rasmus waited. Some moments later Timoth continued, “Give me an example.”

Moving toward the desk, Rasmus asked, “Let’s start with this. What would you say this is?”

Easily, Timoth answered, “A desk!”

Smiling, Rasmus continued, “Now, what is the French word for this same object?”

Slowly this time, Timoth responded, “Rasmus... it has been years since I studied French... but the word ‘bureau’ comes to mind.”

Again, Rasmus smiled, “Exactly, but what comes to your mind when you hear that word ‘bureau’ in an English conversation?”

Gazing at the ceiling, Timoth answered, “The Government.”

Emptying a pack of playing cards onto the desk, Rasmus continued, “Every language uses encoding systems which are known to the people who make up the culture surrounding that language. Within one language and culture you instantly know a word to have one primary meaning but the same word can have a different, unrelated meaning to another language and culture.” Rasmus began sorting the cards on the desk. “I can use just about anything as an encoding system, signs, speech, written symbols. If we share the same system, I can even use these playing cards to encode a message.”

## *The Rasmus & Timoth Dialogues*

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In less than three minutes, Rasmus had rearranged the playing cards into a stack and handed them to Timoth.

"Now, how many letters are there in English? How could the number of playing cards represent that number of letters? Go through these in order and write down your observations."

Slowly Timoth looked through the cards. "A pack of playing cards has fifty-two cards, which is the same as twenty-six times two. So playing cards could give you two of every letter in the alphabet... but I'd have to use one group of cards for the first thirteen letters and one group for the second thirteen letters. I could use Black cards for 'A' through 'M' and use Red cards for 'N' through 'Z'."

Inching along the edge of the desk, Timoth placed each card in order "Spades... 9 of spades, 7 of hearts, 6 of diamonds, 7 of diamonds, 9 of clubs, King of clubs, 5 of spades, 6 of spades, 2 of hearts, 5 of hearts, Queen of clubs, 8 of diamonds, 3 of spades, 8 of clubs, joker." Timoth stopped. "What do I do with a joker?"

Nodding, Rasmus reached for the remaining cards, "It seems that you already know... you stop."

Carefully, Timoth read the message: "Encoded message seems to be 'Its time for lunch', right?"

Opening the desk drawer, Rasmus placed the cards inside and replied, "Fun, isn't it?"

Doorknob in hand, Timoth asked, "Is there any limit to how we can encode messages?"

Exiting the room, Rasmus declared "Limits? There are many ways to encode a message, but you have to look for them. You never know what hidden messages you'll find!"

# *The Rasmus & Timothy Dialogues*

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## *“Pidgins, Creoles, and Other Things”*

Timoth stared at the conversation partners as Rasmus generated OSL signs with odd handshapes. The visitor also signed with similar oddities.

When the visitor left, Timoth asked, “What language was that?”

Rasmus, still standing by the door, turned to face Timoth, “Well, technically it was not a language.”

“Not a language? Then how did you communicate?”

“Timoth! Surely you know by now that language is not at all required for communication.”

“I knew that as soon as I said it. But if you weren’t using language then how certain can you be that you understood each other accurately?”

“There is always the possibility of misunderstanding, even when we do use language as part of our communication.”

“OK... but what was it that you were using to communicate? They looked like OSL signs but, different somehow.”

Rasmus reached for a book from the shelves. “That is what its inventors called ‘Manually Emitted Signed Speech’. Here’s the manual.”

Timoth looked through the book, “It looks like they attempted to match spoken-language words with OSL signs.”

“That’s right. They used different handshapes for similar signs to distinguish various spoken words with similar meanings. But the result is neither spoken language nor OSL. It is a linguistic mix containing elements of both languages, but in the end it does not actually meet the definition of language.”

“Why not?”

## *The Rasmus & Timothy Dialogues*

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"Because the first generation models only used it to communicate with Deaf students, not with each other. Without a community of models, our visitor took this input, made his own modifications, and generated his own unique, personal pseudo-language. He is the only one on this planet to use his particular mix of OSL and spoken language. Since he completed school and found the Deaf community he has begun re-modifying his communication toward the signing used by the Deaf community."

Timoth continued to look through the book. "Why did anyone choose to invent such a thing?"

"The goal was to teach Deaf children. There was a time, not so long ago, when OSL was banned from educational settings with Deaf children. The inventors knew OSL and tried to use OSL signs to encode spoken language. In doing so they were able to sneak a portion of OSL back into the classroom for Deaf students."

"But if it's not a language, what good is it?"

Rasmus gazed at the ceiling and paused. "That is a very good question. It served a political purpose in its time, but it still causes so much division within the Deaf community."

Timoth looked at Rasmus. "So why were you using it with the person who was just here?"

"In a sense, I was being polite, by using the same means of communication that our visitor prefers and uses every day."

"You mean that he doesn't know OSL?"

"Well, he knows parts of OSL, but not the entire language. Likewise he knows parts of spoken language, but is unsuccessful in lipreading alone. My goal was to communicate with him so I adopted a more mutually similar approach to our communication."

"Will I need to learn how to communicate that way?"

"You will encounter people with similarities to his communication style in the community. You may wish to learn about the system. Just be careful to keep it from influencing your OSL fluency."

# *The Rasmus & Timoth Dialogues*

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## *“Transcommunication”*

Rasmus watched as Timoth gazed past Rasmus' shoulder. Timoth nodded and then tapped the shoulder of the person seated behind Timoth. Timoth pointed across the room and two conversations began.

“Well, you have become quite a transcommunicator, Timoth” Rasmus said.

Timoth stared across the table “What makes you say that? What's a 'transcommunicator'?”

“A transcommunicator is one who mediates the exchange of information between two other parties.”

“Um... Isn't that the same as an interpreter?”

“Interpreters are transcommunicators, yes, that is true. But you just successfully transcommunicated a message and no interpreting took place!”

“And just where and how did I accomplish this amazing 'transcommunication' thing?”

“Just now, when that fellow behind me waved at you and you tapped the shoulder of that woman next to you. All he did was raise his eyebrows, look at you, and point at her.”

“Hmm... That's right... no signs, no words”

“But significant communication none the less! You understood his message to mean he wanted her attention.”

“So I turned, tapped her shoulder, looked at her and pointed to him.”

“Transcommunication!”

“But how does interpreting fit into that?”

“The difference, Timoth, is that interpreting adds language to the communication.”



## *The Rasmus & Timoth Dialogues*

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"Adds language? You mean replaces communication with language."

"Oh no, I mean adds." Rasmus pulled out a book and turned a few pages, then gazed at the book and continued "Language is simply a small part of the many ways we communicate."

Timoth looked at the book in Rasmus' hands, pointed to it and said, "Is that written in there? What book is that?"

Rasmus gazed again at Timoth "Hmm?... is *what* written *where*?"

Timoth reached across the table and grabbed the book. "This is a *novel!* Why were you looking at it when you said 'Language is simply a small part of the many ways we communicate?'"

Rasmus slowly reached over and took the book back from Timoth. "And why did you think that I was reading aloud to you?"

Timoth smiled "Because you didn't look at me. You shifted your eye gaze toward the book."

Rasmus nodded "And the fact that I was holding a book combined with my shift of eye gaze toward it meant something to you, didn't it?"

"I thought you were quoting some authority on the subject of communication. That way I'd be more likely to accept your argument without any more questions."

"You thought all of that... But I didn't say I was reading aloud to you. You paid attention to much more than merely the words I was using. So do you agree with my statement now?"

Timoth leaned back in thought. "Your eye gaze and posture told me that what you were saying was perhaps very important and that maybe I should remember it." Timoth's gaze returned to Rasmus, "You communicated with much more than just language."

Rasmus smiled and put the book away.

Timoth smiled. "I will remember the lesson."

## *The Rasmus & Timothy Dialogues*

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### *“Teamed and Relayed Transcommunication”*

Timoth completed generating the target text, verified that the consumer was finished, and then hung up the phone. Timoth then returned to the second level of the convention center. Upon entering the grand ballroom, Timoth noticed Rasmus at the foot of the stage chatting with another person. The two shook hands and parted as Timoth walked toward the stage. Rasmus was picking up notes and preparing to leave as Timoth approached.

“Well, there you are! How has your morning been?” asked Rasmus.

“A fine morning so far. I just completed interpreting a phone call and I found it an interesting experience.”

“Interesting, eh? What made it so interesting? You’ve certainly interpreted telephone calls before.”

“This time there was an interpreter on the other end of the call. I had my consumer in front of me and the other interpreter had another consumer in front of her. That’s the first time I ever experienced interpreting a message to another interpreter.”

Rasmus and Timoth turned toward the back of the grand ballroom and made their way to the doors in the back. “So you relayed your transcommunication.” Rasmus said.

“Relayed transcommunication?” Timoth asked. Rasmus nodded but added no more explanation. Timoth sighed and thought for a moment as they exited the convention center. “Transcommunication is the work we do: interpreting, translation, recited reading, shadowing, transcription, transliteration, and elucidation. So relayed transcommunication requires two people?”

“At least two, yes,” said Rasmus. “And this afternoon you shall see a significant amount of relayed transcommunication during the plenary sessions. Did you see the person I was chatting with just before you came down to the stage? That’s one of my interpreting teammates.”

## *The Rasmus & Timoth Dialogues*

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Timoth stopped and looked at Rasmus. "But you were using Our Sign Language to communicate with her!"

Rasmus' head shifted to one side while looking at Timoth. "Timoth, I hope you're not developing a language bias! I never noticed this in you before. What difference does it make which language I use to communicate with someone?"

"Well, I just assumed that using Our Sign Language meant that she was deaf. I guess I just don't think about using OSL except when deaf people are present."

Rasmus and Timoth entered the restaurant and were soon seated at a table. "Timoth, you are fluent in Our Sign Language. Here we are in an environment filled with many other people, also fluent in OSL; but some of the people here don't have access to spoken language. Doesn't it make sense that we should use the majority language for communication here?"

"Of course," Timoth replied, "I just thought it meant that your interpreting teammate was Deaf."

"But she IS Deaf." Rasmus said, taking a sip of water.

Timoth sat for a moment. Rasmus looked at the menu for a moment, closed the menu, looked at Timoth and finally explained "I will be interpreting from spoken language to Our Sign Language and she will be generating a processed shadowing to more idiomatic OSL on the stage. It provides an interpretation much closer to the quality we normally only achieve through translation. It's actually quite effective!"

Timoth smiled and nodded. "I see, so it works because two heads are better than one!"

# *The Rasmus & Timoth Dialogues*

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## *“Processing Levels”*

Timoth stared into empty space. “How will I ever learn enough words?”

Rasmus looked across the table at Timoth and said “Enough words?”

“To convey the meaning of every message I hear. I can’t see how I will ever learn enough words to capture every meaning, every shade of nuance, every detail. It just seems impossible.”

“Timoth, do you think the work of a Server is accomplished only through words?”

“What do you mean? Of course, Rasmus. Words hold the meaning, we express our thoughts to each other in words.”

“And those two over there aren’t communicating at all?”

Timoth looked across the room at a couple holding hands and staring silently into each other’s eyes. “But they’re not even using language. They’re just staring at each other.”

Rasmus tried again. “So language is the key to our work?”

“Of course”

“And it makes no difference how we send the message, as long as we use the right words?”

“And I will never learn enough words!”

“Well,” said Rasmus, “You are right about that. You will never learn enough words.”

## *The Rasmus & Timoth Dialogues*

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"So I will never be adequate in my work."

"Why do you draw that conclusion?"

"You just agreed that I would never learn enough words. I understood you to mean that I would never gain the fluency needed. So I might as well stop here and find some other way to serve."

"Is that what my words said? Listen to yourself. 'I understood you to mean that....' How did that happen if words are the key? You didn't pay attention to the words I used and you ignored most of the message I have been sending. Timoth, words only hold part of the meanings we share with each other. How we send the meaning is very important, sometimes even more important than the words."

"You mean that I might still succeed in this work?"

"Finally you are listening to my message and not just my words! Yes. Think about how you communicate with a child. Do you use every one of your precious words in that kind of communication?"

"Of course not! The child is still learning language."

"And are *you* still learning language?"

"Yes, but that's different."

"What makes it so different? Are there any people here who know every word of their own language? Is there any moment in life that we can say 'I have finally completed the learning of my language'?" Rasmus leaned back, "If *words* were the key, we'd only be able to communicate with children if they were born with a complete lexicon in their brains. We'd never be able to learn any other language."

Timoth smiled. "So there's hope for me yet?"

"You must focus on the message, not the words."

# *The Rasmus & Timoth Dialogues*

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## *“Interpreting History and Research”*

Timoth sighed.

Rasmus asked, “What’s wrong?”

Timoth closed the book and set it down. “I’ve come to the boring part of the book. It’s all about history and research.”

Rasmus sat next to Timoth. “I see... nothing new, just old information, eh?”

“I’m trying to improve my skills. How can research make any difference in my own work?”

Rasmus picked up the book and flipped through the pages. “Wouldn’t you say this entire book is a matter of history? It’s certainly been a while since it was printed.”

“Yes, of course; but I don’t need to review things even older than this book is. I just want to know about the new and useful things.”

“Aha. New and useful things. There’s your answer right there?”

“Rasmus, why do you torture me like this?”

“Because when you find your own answers you appreciate them more and remember them better than if I simply tell you how the world works.”

“But I’m tired of thinking so hard. Can’t you just explain it to me?”

“You’ll still have to think to accept the argument. If you refuse to think, I might waste my time presenting my case with you just nodding and saying ‘oh, I see’ at the end just to make me change topics. Right?”

Timoth smiled “I guess you do know me pretty well, huh?”

“I have a long history of experience as a Mentor, Timoth. I have evidence for what works and what doesn’t.”

## *The Rasmus & Timothy Dialogues*

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"OK. You just used the word 'history' so I better analyze your last sentence. Let me think for just a moment." Timothy's eyes closed. "History tells you where you have been and what progress has been made. It helps you appreciate the advances of more recent times and lets you know that you are doing things well."

"Good, keep on going."

"Keep on going? I thought I was finished." Timothy sat for a moment in silence.

Rasmus maintained both silence and eye contact with Timothy.

Timothy leaned forward, "You know, Rasmus, this behavior of yours borders on being psychopathic."

Rasmus smiled and leaned back in the chair.

Timothy looked at the ground and thought a little longer. "OK, you said something about evidence. So research provides evidence and unless we have evidence we are only making judgments on opinions and personal biases. So research keeps us 'professional'. How's that?"

"Well done!"

Timothy stared at Rasmus, "I hate it when you make me do that."

"You were the one who brought it up."

"I brought it up? You were the one who asked me 'what's wrong'."

"But you were the one who let out that 'sigh for help'."

Timothy smiled. "Well, I will admit you have raised my curiosity about this next chapter."

# *The Rasmus & Timoth Dialogues*

24

## *“Models of Transcommunication”*

Timoth’s forehead lowered onto the book. “I’ll never memorize all of these models!”

Rasmus stopped and faced Timoth, “Why are you trying to memorize them?”

“So I can be a better interpreter,” Timoth met eyes with Rasmus.

“How will memorizing a model make you a better interpreter?”

“If I understand the model, then I can know more about the process. If I know more about the process, then I can work to improve my skills.”

“Yes, that’s all true. But I still don’t know how memorizing the models fits into all of this. Can’t you understand them without memorizing them?”

Timoth sat up. “But if I don’t memorize them, I’ll forget all the pieces that fit into each little box or triangle.”

Rasmus walked over to the chalkboard on the wall and drew a square on one side and a circle on the other. “What do these stand for?”

“Well, some models use the circle for starting and stopping. Others use it to represent the human mind. Squares usually contain a process or a series of processes.”

“No. The circle stands for understanding and the square stands for memorizing. You didn’t even ask me what this was a model of. I never said it was a model of interpreting.” Rasmus turned toward the board and started to erase it.

“So what is it a model of?”



## *The Rasmus & Timoth Dialogues*

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"Its a model of your dilemma. You say you will never memorize all of the models but your goal is to understand them." Rasmus finished cleaning the board and faced Timoth. "My model showed memorizing and understanding as two separate tasks."

"But it was just a circle and a square. How can you call that a model?"

"Well, looks like you've got the memorizing part done already. But you still don't understand it, so it would seem we still need to work on the understanding."

"So your model simply showed that the two tasks were separate pieces. OK, so now I understand, but I first had to memorize, didn't I." Timoth looked back at the diagram in the book "I'm still stuck."

"What if I hadn't drawn the model at all? Could you still understand it without a picture?"

"Well, I suppose so. You mean that I could have understood the concept even without knowing what the model looked like? Well, if that's true then what do we need models for in the first place?"

Rasmus looked at Timoth and smiled.

Timoth leaned back into the chair "Because models can lay things out to help us understand complex concepts we wouldn't otherwise grasp."

Rasmus nodded, "So stop worrying about memorizing and start trying to understand."

# *The Rasmus & Timoth Dialogues*

26

## *“Five More Models”*

Timoth dropped two tablets into a glass of water and then leaned forward while placing both hands on the desk... waiting for the tablets to dissolve and the tiny bubbles to fill the glass. “When will it end? Please... make it stop!”

Rasmus entered the room and sat on the desk, beside the glass of bubbling liquid. “Make *what* stop?”

“This pounding in my head, these endless models in the book, everything. I can’t take it anymore.” Timoth grabbed the glass and quickly drank the liquid.

“I understand your predicament. I might even say that I feel your pain. The interpreting process is rather complex. In fact, it is quite amazing that it can be done at all!”

Placing the empty glass back on the desk Timoth shuffled over to the chair beside the desk. “I don’t understand all of the complexities of the models presented in the previous chapters. How am I going to understand the next set of models?” Leaning forward, head over knees, with fingers interlaced and resting firmly against back of head, Timoth slowly rocked forward and back while breathing very slowly and deeply.

“Have no fear, Timoth. The presentation of models in Chapter Eleven is intended only to be an overview, not a detailed exploration. The last five models in Chapter Twelve are based on the principles that you already know. The important concepts have already been explained in the book.”

Timoth stopped rocking and looked up at Rasmus. “Which concepts?”

Rasmus walked behind the desk and sat down. “What did you learn in the first few chapters?”

Opening the book to the Table of Contents, Timoth’s finger traced a path down several pages, “Well, first was Communication: Background Knowledge, Semiotics, Physical Context, Pragmatics; then the Linguistic Pyramid, language fluency, language variation and register, and language encoding systems.”

## *The Rasmus & Timoth Dialogues*

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"Yes. Good. All of those are essential elements in the final five models." Rasmus leaned forward and turned a few pages in the book. "See here where it identifies the models to be described?"

"Wait... There are more than five models!"

"That's right, but the first ones are just models of communication, the last five are models of *transcommunication*. So the author is working on a set of parallel concepts, building each model upon the previous one."

"So these last models will finally explain everything?"

"What, like the meaning of life and the origin of the universe? Is that what you mean?"

"No." Timoth smiled. "I just mean everything about interpreting."

"Timoth, I'm surprised that you even think it is possible. I haven't met a human being yet who knows everything there is to know about any single topic. I can't imagine that anyone could ever create a model that explains half of the complexity of interpreting."

"So you mean I'll still have to study even more models... I'm never going to be done learning?" Timoth stood and reached for the empty glass and started digging into a pocket for more tablets.

Rasmus took the glass from Timoth's hand and smiled. "Don't panic, my friend! You are undergoing intensive learning right now, but soon you will be an Independent Server. We must always strive to learn and improve - I am no exception. But the important thing right now is that you know *what* you need to learn and *how* to improve yourself. You have done well so far and I expect great things from you. Just take a moment to rest and clear your head. Then you will be ready to complete this part of your learning.

Timoth sat down again and leaned back into the chair "Thanks for calming me down. I just want to do a good job."

Rasmus nodded, "So recognize that you have already learned a great deal and now it is time to synthesize that knowledge into an integrated understanding of the work that we do."

## *The Rasmus & Timoth Dialogues*

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### *“The End Is Only a Beginning”*

Rasmus took a step back from the artwork hanging on the wall. “What does this say to you?”

Timoth glanced up from the theory book. “Is that another print by M.C. Escher? I just love waterfalls.”

“How much do you know about water?”

“Ah, Rasmus. You are trying to trick me into thinking that you are really asking me about water when something else is up your sleeve.”

Rasmus placed a marker in Timoth’s book and closed it. “Now I know that you really have been paying attention all this time. Are you going to answer my question?”

“In a moment.” Timoth looked closer at the print on the wall. “Hey, this waterfall never stops. It’s both the beginning and the end of the stream. So maybe its like the water cycle where the amount of water on the planet is finite and it simply recycles.”

“Recycles? It’s just a print: it’s ink and paper. How can anything recycle on a fixed document?” Rasmus started to grin.

“What’s that thing in your hands right there?”

“This? This is your book, ‘The Interpreting Handbook’. What does this have to do with art?” Rasmus’ grin became a smile.

## *The Rasmus & Timothy Dialogues*

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"Does the book still have any value to you? Do you ever re-read portions of it?"

"Well, it's not exactly a page-turning novel. But it contains useful information about the profession of interpreting... so, yes, I guess I re-read sections once in a while."

"So a book's information can be recycled. But who is doing the recycling?"

"Who is doing the recycling? Um.... well, I'm the one reading it."

"Yes, and I hope you keep on reading; so even though it is just a book - ink on paper - it's contents can still be used more than once"

"You mean the words?"

"Sure... the words. But also the author's intentions, the meanings that you have derived from it, the figures... all of it."

"Well, of course. So this work - this book - is somehow like that print that I just put up in the room?"

"And that other print you put up of the *Hand With Reflecting Sphere*."

"Sometimes you surprise me Timothy. I really am proud of your observational skills and your ability to apply your observations to your continued growth," Rasmus placed a hand on Timothy's shoulder.

"I've learned that we communicate in different ways. What we do, how we do it, how we arrange our physical settings, the books we read, the art we look at, the things we create. Everything about us communicates something to everyone we encounter. Even if they encounter the things we have created years later, we continue to communicate even to people we will never meet."

"So, in other words, even though you are just now finishing your theory book, you recognize that none of us is ever finished learning?"

"Well put. Now, give me back my book."

*The Rasmus & Timoth Dialogues*

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M.C. Escher's "Waterfall" (1961)

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