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ONE VOICE, TWO LANGUAGES, ZERO SECONDS: THE ART OF SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETING

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Abstract

Simultaneous interpreting is one of the most complex forms of professional language mediation. Unlike written translation, it requires interpreters to listen to a source speech, process its meaning, formulate an equivalent message and produce it in the target language almost simultaneously. This process requires a combination of advanced linguistic competence, concentration, memory, anticipation, rapid decision-making, self-monitoring and intercultural awareness. The present article examines the main characteristics of simultaneous interpreting, its relationship with consecutive interpreting, and the professional competencies required for effective interpreting. The empirical part of the study is based on a survey of 40 freelance interpreters working in Uzbekistan and a semi-structured interview conducted with an experienced specialist in translation and interpreting. The survey focuses on interpreters' perceptions of quality, including completeness of information, terminology, fluency, fidelity, pronunciation and intonation. It also investigates the interpreter's role in intercultural communication and strategies used when dealing with culture-specific terms, gestures, speaker corrections and explanatory additions. The findings indicate that fluent delivery, appropriate terminology and faithful transmission of meaning are considered important dimensions of interpreting quality. At the same time, respondents recognize the need for cultural mediation and contextual adaptation. The study also highlights the close relationship between consecutive and simultaneous interpreting, suggesting that consecutive interpreting can provide an important foundation for the development of simultaneous interpreting skills. The article concludes that successful simultaneous interpreting should be understood as a multidimensional professional activity combining linguistic accuracy, cognitive flexibility, communicative competence and intercultural awareness.

Keywords

simultaneous interpreting, consecutive interpreting, intercultural communication, interpreter training, interpreting quality, cognitive skills, professional competence

Annotatsiya

Sinxron tarjima professional til vositachiligining eng murakkab shakllaridan biridir. Yozma tarjimadan farqli ravishda, sinxron tarjimon manba nutqini tinglashi, uning mazmunini qayta ishlashi, ekvivalent ma'noni shakllantirishi va uni maqsad tilida deyarli bir vaqtning o'zida ifodalashi kerak. Ushbu jarayon yuqori darajadagi lingvistik kompetensiya, diqqatni jamlash, xotira, oldindan taxmin qilish, tezkor qaror qabul qilish, o'z nutqini nazorat qilish va madaniyatlararo xabardorlikni talab qiladi. Mazkur maqolada sinxron tarjimaning asosiy xususiyatlari, uning ketma-ket tarjima bilan aloqasi hamda samarali tarjima uchun zarur bo'lgan professional kompetensiyalar tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotning empirik qismi O'zbekistonda faoliyat yurituvchi 40 nafar mustaqil tarjimon o'rtasida o'tkazilgan so'rovnoma va tarjima sohasi bo'yicha tajribali mutaxassis bilan o'tkazilgan yarim tuzilgan intervyuga asoslangan. So'rovnomada tarjima sifatining axborotning to'liqligi, terminologik aniqlik, ravonlik, asl nutqqa sodiqlik, talaffuz va intonatsiya kabi mezonlari o'rganildi. Shuningdek, madaniyatga xos tushunchalarni tarjima qilish, imo-ishoralardan foydalanish, notiqni tuzatish va qo'shimcha izoh berish kabi masalalar ham tahlil qilindi. Natijalar ravon nutq, to'g'ri terminologiyadan foydalanish va asl mazmunni sodiqlik bilan yetkazish tarjima sifatining muhim jihatlari ekanligini ko'rsatadi. Shu bilan birga, respondentlar madaniyatlararo vositachilik va kontekstga moslashish zarurligini ham ta'kidlaydilar. Tadqiqot natijalari ketma-ket tarjima va sinxron tarjima o'rtasida yaqin bog'liqlik mavjudligini ko'rsatib, ketma-ket tarjima sinxron tarjima ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirish uchun muhim asos bo'lishi mumkinligini ko'rsatadi. Maqolada samarali sinxron tarjima lingvistik aniqlik, kognitiv moslashuvchanlik, kommunikativ kompetensiya va madaniyatlararo xabardorlikni birlashtiruvchi ko'p qirrali professional faoliyat sifatida baholanadi.

Kalit so'zlar: sinxron tarjima, ketma-ket tarjima, tarjimon tayyorlash, tarjima sifati, madaniyatlararo kommunikatsiya, kognitiv ko'nikmalar, professional kompetensiya

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of international communication has significantly increased the importance of professional interpreting. International conferences, diplomatic meetings,

business negotiations, academic events, tourism activities and multinational organizations frequently involve participants who do not share the same language. In such situations, interpreters provide an essential communicative bridge between speakers and audiences.

Interpreting differs from written translation because it takes place in real time and normally does not allow the professional to stop the speaker, revise the entire message or extensively consult reference materials. The interpreter must understand the incoming message and produce a meaningful target-language version under significant time pressure. Among the different modes of interpreting, simultaneous interpreting is particularly demanding because comprehension and production take place almost simultaneously.

The title of this article, "One Voice, Two Languages, Zero Seconds," reflects the central paradox of simultaneous interpreting. Although the interpreter appears to simply reproduce a speech in another language, the actual process involves several cognitive and linguistic operations occurring at the same time. The interpreter listens to the source speech, identifies its meaning, predicts possible developments, selects appropriate terminology, reformulates the message and monitors the quality of the output. The study has four main objectives. First, it aims to identify the principal characteristics and challenges of simultaneous interpreting. Second, it examines how professional interpreters understand quality and their own professional role. Third, it explores strategies used when interpreters encounter culturally specific terms and communication problems. Finally, it considers the relationship between consecutive and simultaneous interpreting and the role of consecutive interpreting in professional training.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Concept of Simultaneous Interpreting

Simultaneous interpreting is generally understood as a mode in which the interpreter produces the target-language message while the source speaker continues speaking. The interpreter usually listens through headphones and speaks through a microphone from an interpreting booth. In some contexts, simultaneous interpreting may also be provided through whispered interpreting or other technical arrangements.

The defining characteristic of simultaneous interpreting is the extremely limited time available for processing. Unlike written translators, simultaneous interpreters cannot normally return to an earlier sentence and correct it after completing the entire text. They must continuously make decisions while new information is arriving.

Experience plays an important role in this process. A beginner may concentrate heavily on individual words, whereas an experienced interpreter is more likely to focus on meaning, context and the overall structure of the speaker's argument. This allows experienced professionals to manage the simultaneous demands of listening and speaking more efficiently.

2.2. Simultaneous and Consecutive Interpreting

Consecutive interpreting is another major mode of oral interpreting. In consecutive interpreting, the interpreter listens to a segment of the source speech and produces the target-language version after the speaker pauses. Depending on the length of the speech, the interpreter may rely on memory and notes.

Note-taking is particularly important in consecutive interpreting. Professional interpreters often develop individualized systems of symbols, abbreviations and structural marks that help them reconstruct the logical organization of a speech. The purpose of notes is not to record every word but to preserve the essential meaning, relationships and structure of the message.

The interview used in this study supports this perspective. According to the interview data, interpreter training may begin with general interpreting techniques before students move to consecutive interpreting and subsequently to simultaneous interpreting. Consecutive interpreting can therefore function as preparation for the more demanding real-time conditions of simultaneous interpreting.

This relationship should not, however, be interpreted as meaning that one mode is superior to the other. The two modes serve different purposes. Consecutive interpreting may be appropriate for smaller meetings, negotiations and situations where direct interaction is required, whereas simultaneous interpreting is particularly useful for large conferences and multilingual events where interruptions would significantly reduce efficiency.

2.3. Interpreting Quality

One of the central questions in interpreting research is how quality should be defined and evaluated. A common assumption is that a good interpreter should reproduce the source speech accurately. However, professional quality involves more than literal correspondence between words.

Completeness of information is an important criterion because interpreters should communicate the essential content of the original speech. At the same time, complete word-for-word reproduction is often impossible because languages differ in grammatical structure, vocabulary and information organization.

Fluency is another important dimension of interpreting quality. The target-language speech should be understandable, coherent and natural. Frequent hesitation, repetition or unnatural structures can make it difficult for listeners to follow the message even if the basic meaning is correct.

2.4. The Interpreter as a Cultural Mediator

Interpreters do not work only between languages. They also work between cultures. A speaker may use references, concepts, idioms or examples that are familiar to the source-language audience but unfamiliar to the target audience.

In such cases, a literal translation may not be sufficient. The interpreter may need to provide a brief explanation or select a culturally appropriate equivalent. This does not necessarily mean changing the speaker’s message. Instead, the interpreter helps the audience access the intended meaning.

The interpreter therefore occupies a complex professional position. On the one hand, neutrality and fidelity are important. On the other hand, successful communication sometimes requires pragmatic adaptation.

The ability to make such decisions requires cultural knowledge and professional judgment. An interpreter should understand not only the languages involved but also the social and cultural contexts in which communication takes place.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach. The quantitative component consisted of a survey of 40 interpreters working in Uzbekistan.

The qualitative component consisted of a semi-structured interview with an experienced specialist in translation and interpreting. The survey participants were freelance interpreters based in Uzbekistan. Uzbek was identified as their A language, while English was either their B language or one of their B languages. The sample included 34 women and 6 men. Participants were between 22 and 36 years old. The mean age was approximately 29 years, while the median age was 26.5.

Participants were recruited through professional and personal contacts. The questionnaire was distributed electronically, and responses were collected over approximately two months. The survey examined interpreters' perceptions of professional quality and their approaches to different interpreting situations.

Because the survey involved a relatively small, non-random sample, its results should be interpreted as descriptive rather than representative of all interpreters in Uzbekistan. The study reflects the perceptions and reported practices of the participants rather than independently measured interpreting performance.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Quality Criteria

The first part of the survey examined the factors that interpreters consider important for high-quality performance.

The results for fluent and pleasant delivery were particularly strong. Thirty-seven respondents, representing 92.5% of the sample, gave the highest rating to this criterion, while three respondents (7.5%) selected the middle rating. No participant selected the lowest rating.

This result demonstrates that fluency is considered a central component of professional interpreting. Even when an interpreter conveys the correct information, poor delivery may reduce the audience's ability to understand and follow the message.

Terminological usage and word choice also received high ratings. Twenty-eight participants (70%) selected the highest rating, while 12 participants (30%) selected the middle rating. No respondent selected the lowest category.

The difference between fluency and fidelity is particularly interesting. It may indicate that interpreters recognize the practical difficulty of preserving every detail

while maintaining fluent real-time delivery. In simultaneous interpreting, the professional sometimes has to prioritize the central meaning of a message when processing conditions become particularly demanding.

These results confirm that interpreting quality should be understood as multidimensional. Accuracy is essential, but successful communication also requires a natural and understandable oral performance.

4.2. The Role of the Interpreter

The respondents were also asked how they understood their professional role.

Nineteen participants (47.5%) described their role primarily as translating as faithfully as possible. Seventeen participants (42.5%) defined it as acting as a mediator and bridging gaps arising from cultural differences. Four respondents (10%) provided other definitions.

The relatively small difference between the first two categories is significant. It demonstrates that interpreters see both fidelity and mediation as important aspects of their profession.

This suggests that cultural mediation does not necessarily mean personal intervention. An interpreter may facilitate understanding without expressing personal opinions or changing the speaker's position.

4.3. Culture-Specific Terms

One of the clearest findings concerned strategies for dealing with culture-specific terms. Only five respondents (12.5%) said they would simply repeat the foreign name or term. Another five respondents (12.5%) preferred replacing it with the closest equivalent in the target language.

The majority, 30 respondents (75%), stated that they would explain the term.

The preference for explanation demonstrates the importance of intercultural competence. A term may have no direct equivalent in another language, and simply replacing it with an approximate word may result in a loss of meaning.

This is one of the situations in which professional judgment becomes particularly important. The interpreter must decide what information is essential and what can be omitted without changing the communicative purpose of the original message.

4.4. Intonation and Gestures

The survey also examined non-verbal and paralinguistic elements.

Thirty-one respondents (77.5%) stated that they use or consider intonation important in interpreting, while nine (22.5%) did not select this option.

Intonation can communicate emphasis, contrast, uncertainty, questions and other aspects of meaning. An interpreter who ignores these elements may produce a grammatically accurate but pragmatically different message.

Responses concerning gestures were more conditional. Four respondents (10%) answered yes, 30 (75%) answered sometimes and six (15%) answered no.

This suggests that gestures are not considered a universal requirement. Their use may depend on the context, type of event, audience and individual interpreting style.

4.5. Correcting the Speaker and Adding Explanations

When asked whether they correct the speaker, two respondents (5%) answered yes, 12 (30%) answered no and 26 (65%) answered sometimes.

The high percentage of "sometimes" indicates that correction is viewed as context-dependent. In certain situations, a correction may be necessary to prevent serious misunderstanding. However, excessive intervention could conflict with the principle of faithful representation.

The survey also found that 32 respondents (80%) reported providing explanations, while eight respondents (20%) reported that they did not.

This result is consistent with the finding concerning culture-specific terms. Interpreters may need to add short explanations when literal translation would not communicate the intended meaning effectively.

4.6. Professional Competence

The findings demonstrate that simultaneous interpreting requires a combination of different competencies.

First, interpreters need strong command of both working languages. However, linguistic knowledge alone is insufficient. The interpreter must also have broad general knowledge and be familiar with the subject of the event.

Second, concentration and attention are essential. Since the interpreter cannot stop

the speaker, losing a few seconds of information may create difficulties that affect subsequent sentences.

Third, self-control is important because interpreting can be stressful. The interpreter must continue speaking even when the source speaker changes direction, speaks quickly or uses unfamiliar terminology.

Finally, interpreters require the ability to evaluate their own performance. Self-monitoring allows professionals to identify recurring problems and improve their delivery.

5. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SIMULTANEOUS AND CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETING

The findings of both the survey and interview support the idea that simultaneous and consecutive interpreting should be considered interconnected professional skills.

Consecutive interpreting develops several abilities that are directly relevant to simultaneous interpreting. These include active listening, analysis, memory, note-taking, logical organization and reformulation.

Simultaneous interpreting adds another level of difficulty because the interpreter must produce the target-language message while continuing to receive new information.

Therefore, professional interpreter education should not treat simultaneous interpreting as a completely isolated skill. Instead, it should develop a broad interpreting competence that allows professionals to adapt to different situations.

6. CONCLUSION

Simultaneous interpreting is a demanding professional activity that combines language competence, cognitive flexibility, communication skills and intercultural awareness. The interpreter must listen, understand, analyze, reformulate and speak within a highly restricted time frame. The results of the survey conducted among 40 interpreters in Uzbekistan demonstrate that fluent delivery, terminology, completeness and fidelity are important elements of interpreting quality. Pronunciation and intonation were also identified as significant factors.

At the same time, the participants generally maintained a neutral understanding of their professional role. This suggests that mediation does not necessarily involve

personal intervention. Instead, the interpreter can facilitate communication while maintaining professional distance. Future research could address these limitations by involving a larger number of interpreters and comparing novice and experienced professionals. Researchers could also analyze recorded interpreting performances in order to compare perceived quality with objectively observable features such as omissions, terminology errors, pauses, reformulations and delivery speed.

Overall, the study demonstrates that simultaneous interpreting is far more than the simple conversion of words from one language into another. It is an intellectual and communicative activity requiring preparation, discipline, cultural awareness, rapid decision-making and professional responsibility. The successful interpreter must be able to remain accurate without becoming mechanical, fluent without sacrificing meaning, and culturally sensitive without abandoning neutrality.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made for interpreter education and professional development.

First, interpreter-training programmes should provide students with systematic practice in both consecutive and simultaneous interpreting. These modes should be viewed as complementary rather than completely separate skills.

Second, training should focus on terminology development. Students should learn how to create personal glossaries, research specialized vocabulary and prepare terminology before professional assignments.

Third, students should regularly practice pronunciation, intonation and fluent delivery. These elements are essential because interpreting is an oral performance and the audience must be able to follow the message easily.

Fourth, training should include intercultural communication. Students should practice dealing with culture-specific references, idioms and concepts that do not have direct equivalents in the target language.

Fifth, interpreters should develop self-monitoring skills. Recording and reviewing interpreting performances can help professionals identify repeated problems and improve their performance.

Finally, professional preparation should include subject-specific knowledge. Interpreters working in tourism, business, diplomacy, education or other specialized fields should develop familiarity with the terminology and concepts of their professional areas.

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