Interpretation and Interpreters: Focus on Arabic

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Abstract

Conducting simultaneous and consecutive interpretations from English into Arabic is a problematic issue that needs to be addressed. Difficulties come from the fact that the brain of the interpreter is performing a number of tasks that need a high level and intensive concentration at the same time. The interpreter is listening to, analyzing, and rendering what the speaker just said on the spot. Being unfamiliar with the topic, and the fast pace of the speaker make interpretation more difficult. Maintaining the same level of fluency and delivering what the speaker said in the same style and tone to ensure that the message reaches the audience in the right manner are some of these difficulties. This study endeavors to investigate the reasons behind the difficulties that interpreters face and try to suggest some solutions to overcome these difficulties. The study data is a speech by King Abdullah II of Jordan, a speech by President Obama, and a speech by British Prime Minister Cameron at the UN. These speeches were chosen based on their authenticity and difficulty. The participants are 20 students taking simultaneous and consecutive courses at the University of Jordan. The results show that students' nervousness, being concerned with the judgment of their performance by their professor, dissatisfaction with their abilities, being afraid of making mistakes and eventually losing marks made the students' interpretation weak.

Introduction

Interpreting has been in existence ever since human beings have used the spoken word. It played a very important role in the relationships between people of different origins since the beginning of mankind. It became more and more widely spread due to a number of reasons such as Exploration expeditions where people needed to communicate with others who spoke different languages. Religion where people of different faiths wanted to share and teach their beliefs to others. The immigration of mankind from one place to another was another reason for the spread of interpretation. Interpretation was defined by many scholars. (Namy,1978: 25) defines it as "Interpreting […] is not merely transposing from one language to another.

It is, rather, throwing a semantic bridge between two different cultures, two different "thought worlds". According to Nolan it is "a nutshell as conveying understanding. Its usefulness stems from the fact that a speaker's meaning is best expressed in his or her native tongue but is best understood in the languages of the listeners". (Nolan, 2005:3). Interpreting is "a form of translation (in the wider sense) in which (a) the source-language text is presented only once and thus cannot be reviewed or replayed, and (b) the target-language text is produced under time

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pressure, with little chance for correction and revision" (Munday,2009 :133). Performing consecutive and simultaneous interpretation is a challenging task that requires a higher level of concentration, stress management, and control. It is used as a means to bridge communication between two or more speakers who are not speaking the same language. According to Kade interpreting is a form of translation in which the first and final rendition in another language is produced on the basis of a one-time presentation of an utterance in a source language" (Kade cited in Franz Pochhacker, 2004:11).

Interpretation is a complex practice that requires the interpreter to fully understand, analyze, and process spoken messages. The interpreter, after processing this information, renders the message into another language. Consecutive interpretation was long the standard method until simultaneous interpretation was first tried out on a large scale, and found to be workable, at the Nuremberg trials. The universal publicity of the 1945-6 Nuremberg Trials contributed to the popularity of SI (Bowen and Bowen 1984: 25) being the first experience of SI on a large scale (Bowen and Bowen 1985: 77; Roland 1999: 128ff) that has helped establish the belief in the effectiveness of SI. Hence the purpose of this study is to investigate the difficulties that Arab students are faced with when they try to start an interpretation task. To achieve the study goal, the Effort Model which was proposed by Daniel Gile to help interpreters understand the "difficulties [of interpreting] and select appropriate strategies and tactics"(Gile, 1992: 191) will be used as a theoretical framework of the study.

2. Literature review

2.1. Simultaneously and Consecutive Interpretation

2.1.1. Simultaneously Interpretation (SI)

Simultaneous interpretation is the process of repeating what someone says in another language at the moment that person is speaking. The interpreter renders the message that is spoken as fast as possible for the audience of one language. The interpreter interprets the speech or the message from the source language simultaneously into the target language while simultaneously listening to and comprehending the next sentence. During the process of simultaneous interpretation, the interpreter works in a fixed or mobile soundproofed booth with at least two interpreters that take turns every ten to thirty minutes according to the difficulty of the speeches, language combination, and velocity of the speaker. Research has shown that after 25 minutes, the accuracy and completeness of simultaneous interpreters decrease dramatically. The speaker in the conference or meeting room speaks into a microphone, the interpreter sits in small sound isolation booths in the back of the room receives the sound through a headset, and conveys the message into a microphone.

The audience in the meeting room selects the relevant channel to hear the interpretation which is broadcast via a wireless system to the delegates who listen on small receivers with earphones. The receivers are multi-channel so the delegates can select the channel that corresponds to their languages. Simultaneous interpretation is most commonly used for formal occasions, international congresses, live broadcasts, conferences with many speakers and a large audience, legal proceedings, and corporate meetings. It is carried out with the use of technical equipment that includes closed soundproofed booths, equipped with microphones, headphones, and recorders. In most cases, the booths are made to accommodate two interpreters who should not work for more than half an hour or forty minutes at a time. They need to be able to see the main room from the booth, as well as the visual aids that the speaker uses.

2.1.2. Consecutive Interpretation (CI)

Consecutive interpretation was long the standard method until simultaneous interpretation was first tried out on a large scale, and found to be workable, at the Nuremberg trials. In consecutive interpreting, the interpreter listens to the speaker, takes notes, and then reproduces the speech when the speaker pauses to allow interpretation in the target language. Normally the speaker stops at the end of every paragraph or completes a thought every 1–5 minutes. When the speaker pauses or finishes speaking, the interpreter then translates a portion of the message or the entire message into the target language. The consecutive interpreter depends very much on memory and a good note-taking technique. Few people can memorize a full paragraph in one hearing without loss of detail therefore interpreters are trained in special note-taking and memory techniques that enable them to render long passages accurately. Consecutive interpreters develop and utilize their own ideogramic symbols for notes to retain the thoughts and ideas of the speaker which allows them to take down not the words, but the thoughts of the speaker. The reason behind using this technique is that writing down words in the source language makes the interpreters' job harder when they try to render the speaker's message into the target language. In consecutive interpreting the interpreter stands or sits beside the speaker, listening and taking notes. Consecutive interpretation is mainly used where a small number of people, or where a personal touch is required or in press conferences, interviews, business meetings, teleconferences, or any type of one-on-one exchange.

2.1.3. Daniel Gile"Efforts Model" (EM).

In the seventies, models based on the information-processing paradigm (Gerver 1975, Moser 1978) were developed to account for the mental operation of simultaneous interpreting. Setton (1997), Paradis (1994) and Mizuno (1994, 1995) have also developed their own models, similarly based on cognitive science. Gile as a leading light in the world of interpreting research and experienced trainer of student interpreters, proposed efforts model to help interpreters understand the "difficulties [of interpreting] and select appropriate strategies and tactics". He says

"The Effort Models are designed to help them[interpreters] understand these difficulties [of interpreting] and select appropriate strategies and tactics. They are based on the concept of Processing Capacity and on the fact that some mental operations in interpreting require much Processing Capacity."(1992:191). According to him, there are 4 efforts involved when interpreting: First the listening and analyzing effort: this occurs when the interpreter is listening to the speaker in the source language, identifying the words, and at the same time understanding the words to get the message as a whole. Concerning all "comprehension-oriented operations, from the analysis of the soundwaves carrying the source-language speech which reach the interpreter's ears through the identification of words to the final decisions about the 'meaning' of the utterance" (Gile,1995: 162). These efforts are related to understanding: the mere hearing of the sounds of words is useless if the interpreter's brain does not convert them into a meaningful message. Second is the short-term memory effort: this is more like a storage mechanism where information is kept temporarily from the time a speech segment is heard to the time it is reformulated in the target speech or disappears from memory. It is "more as a storage mechanism where information is temporarily kept before further processing takes place"(Liu, 2008: 173). Third the production effort: in simultaneous interpreting, this is when the message is reformulated in the target language and note production during the first stage of consecutive -while the interpreter is listening, but not interpreting yet. Production Effort in consecutive interpreting is further divided into two production phases, the first being the moment in which the interpreter listens to the SL speech and takes notes and the second being the TL speech delivery (Gile, 1995: 165). Fourth the coordination effort: this effort allows the interpreters to find a balance among all the previous efforts so they can perform the best way possible. Coordination Effort: compared to "the air-traffic controller for the interpreting that takes place, allowing the interpreter to manage her focus of attention between the listening and analysis task and the ongoing self-monitoring that occurs during performance"(Leeson, 2005: 57). Once interpreters achieve this coordination point, they are able to perform the interpreting job in the best way, since their skills are balanced with the task in question.

This is why the Coordination Effort plays an important role: the "art of smooth interpretation is based on the art of smooth coordination. Even if sometimes these Efforts overlap, coordination actually finds the balance between all the factors." (Kriston, 2012: 81). According to Gile Consecutive Interpreting consists of two phases: a listening and reformulation phrase and a reconstruction phase (1992:191, 1995b:179):

Phase One: I=L+M+N

I=Interpreting, L= listening, and analyzing the source language speech, short-term memory required between the time information is heard and the time it is written down in the notes, and N= note-taking.

Phase Two: I= Rem+Read+P.

Two of Consecutive Interpreting, interpreters retrieve messages from their short-term memory and reconstruct the speech (Rem), read the notes (N), and produce the Target Language Speech (P)

Gile's Effort Model for Simultaneous Interpreting is:

SI=L+M+P

SI=Simultaneous Interpreting. L=Listening and Analysis, which includes "all the mental operations between perception of a discourse by auditory mechanisms and the moment at which the interpreter either assigns or decides not to assign, a meaning (or several potential meanings) to the segment which he has heard".

M=Short-term Memory, which includes "all the mental operations related to storage in memory of heard segments of discourse until either their restitution in the target language, their loss if they vanish from memory, or a decision by the interpreter not to interpret them. "P=Production, which includes "all the mental operations between the moment at which the interpreter decides to convey a datum or an idea and the moment at which he articulates (overtly produces) the form he has prepared to articulate" (1995a:93). Gile emphasizes the significance of Short-term Memory (STM) and that the memory effort is assumed to stem from the need to store the words of a proposition until the hearer receives the end of that proposition. Memory skill is a very important skill or technique which is needed and required for a good interpreter.

Phelan states "The interpreter needs a good short-term memory to retain what he or she has just heard and a good long-term memory to put the information into context. The ability to concentrate is a factor as is the ability to analyze and process what is heard" (2001:4-5). It should be provided in the early stage of interpreter training. Trainee interpreters should learn this skill in order to improve the quality of their interpretation. The main purpose of this training is to achieve a better understanding of the source language, which will lead to successful and better interpreting. According to LinYuruet, al. "Memory in consecutive interpreting consists of nothing more than understanding the meaning which is conveyed by the words" (Lin et al., 1999:9). There are different ways and methods of training STM for CI and SI. Interpreting starts with the encoding of the information from the original speaker. According to Gile's Effort Model, interpreting is an STM-centered activity; the process of interpreting could be re-postulated into

Encoding information from the Source Language + Storing Information + Retrieval of Information Decoding Information into the Target language. Another useful and effective tool in memory training is Mnemonic Memory. A Mnemonic is a device, such as a formula or rhyme, used as an aid in remembering. The basic principle of Mnemonics is to use as many of the best functions of the human brain as possible to encode information.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection Method

The method used in this research to analyze the data and answer the research question was of a qualitative-descriptive nature. Results were presented in the form of a descriptive essay. (Dornyei,2007:37-38) believes that "qualitative research design works with a wide range of data including recorded interviews, various types of texts and images...during data processing. most data are transformed into a textual form because most quantitative data analysis is done with words". The data were collected from students in a computerized interpreting lab. The interpretation of each student was recorded at the same time of interpretation so the students could listen to their own interpretations.

The purpose of this is to make students hear their own voices and learn from their mistakes. Each student was given a number of ideas and thoughts to interpret. After each complete idea or thought the recorded speech was stopped in order to give the student some time to take notes and then commence the interpretation. The students' Interpretations were recorded in order to be analyzed later. The problems the students faced during the interpretation process were written down and discussed by the students. The decisions each student has made to solve each and every problem were also written down and discussed.

The students also discussed the unexpected situations that they were confronted with. Finally, feedback from the students was reported after performing the interpretation for further analysis.

3.2. Method of Analysis.

A content analysis was carried out for all the collected information. The first thing to be discussed was the difficulties encountered during the interpreting phases and how the students had dealt with these difficulties. Each student spoke about the difficulties he/she has faced and what decisions he/she has made to overcome these difficulties.

A list was made of all the difficulties the students have faced and the decisions the students have made. Another list for the frequency of problems was also made. The student's ability to solve the problems occurring during the interpreting process was discussed and evaluated with all the students.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESEARCH DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

After analyzing the data, the researcher found that the students faced the following difficulties:

1) Lack of cultural awareness or cultural knowledge. Cultural differences may cause confusion and cultural misunderstandings. Understanding and being able to fluently speak the target language is not enough. Interpreters must have a deep-rooted sense of cultural awareness. They should have a profound understanding of the cultural differences between the source language and the target language. All the 20 students failed to interpret "Klu Klux Klansmen" which was mentioned in Cameron's speech "But I say: would we sit back and allow right-wing extremists, Nazis or Klu Klux Klansmen to recruit on our university campuses? No." Cameron.

2) The speed of talking or delivery by the speaker was another difficulty the students faced. Most of them complained about the speed of President Obama and Prime Minister Cameron. Since they were not able to hear well due to the speed of both speakers it was hard for them to comprehend well which eventually led to mistranslation, loss of information, and poor results. 3) Having no background knowledge about what they were listening to made it difficult for the interpreters to grasp everything that was said. Being unfamiliar with the subject material being discussed, not briefed about the topic of the speeches, and not given the chance to familiarize themselves with the materials and respective terminology made them nervous and stressed. This led to weak and inaccurate interpretations.

4) Another difficulty was note-taking, decoding notes, and expressing and reformulating ideas. The students tried to write down everything they heard. Finding or using the appropriate symbols to represent everything that is said and then rendering the verbal translation at the appropriate time was not used by the students. Deciding what important to take notes on made them miss a lot of information which made it hard for them to make sense of their notes after the pauses. All these things made them tense and confused which resulted in low efficiency in interpreting.

5) Being unable to anticipate what is coming next was another difficulty. Due to the different structure of both languages Arabic and English students were not able to anticipate what coming next.

6) Lack of self-confidence in their language abilities made the students reluctant, hesitant, and afraid to take risks and perform well. The researcher believes that perception of ability or self-confidence is a very important factor in introducing a high-quality interpretation. The outcomes depend heavily on their self-confidence that they can perform the job.

7) Thinking about getting high marks or losing marks was a major obstacle in front of the students. It was obvious to the researcher that thinking about the grades reduced students'

preference for challenging tasks and the quality of their thinking which made their performance weak.

8) Some students are perfectionists and they think that anything less than an A grade is a failure. Because of that, they felt so nervous during the process of interpretation. As a result, their performance was badly affected.

9) As non-native speakers of English the students faced the problem of applying linguistic knowledge from their native language which made them produce errors of syntax, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Many words were incorrectly pronounced or said with difficulty as a result of the difference in phonological systems.

4. Recommendations

A. In order to relay the message as accurately as possible and to facilitate the oral exchange between the speaker and the listener effectively the interpreters must be aware of the culture of the languages. They should have a good cultural background of the speaker and must be culturally perceptive to get the message across in the best possible way.

B. Speed of delivery or speaking fast by the native speaker is a major problem for interpreters; therefore, in most cases, the resulting utterance would be incoherent. To overcome this problem, the interpreters, need to capture the essential information and summarize what has been said without omitting the important ideas. They should avoid a word-for-word interpretation that would risk losing the meaning of the message. Interpreters can only do their best, and interpret as much as they can within the limited time.

C. Students should know that feeling nervous during the interpretation process isa normal thing. They should cope with stress and self-control when dealing with difficult speakers and find their own techniques to control that nervousness. Interpreters therefore need to keep their cool and remain relaxed, even in tough situations.

D. Anticipation is a useful strategy that can be used by the interpreters. The interpreters should anticipate as much as they can what the message is going to be, what is upcoming, and what direction the speech is taking. Lederer (1978:331) classifies anticipation into two types: "anticipation based on sense expectation. i.e. semantically based, and the other is based on language prediction i.e. lexico- grammatically based. In the former case, the interpreter "predicts the appearance of words that frequently occur together in speech," whereas in the latter, he expects the speaker's intended meaning".

E. Self-confidence is very important for interpreter's performance. It comes from belief in their own skills, experience, and ability to perform roles, functions, and tasks. Students need to know

that making mistakes is inevitable, especially in new or potentially difficult situations. This should not affect their self-confidence on the contrary it should be a motive for them to develop confidence.

F. Interpreters should develop a series of strategies or tactics that can be used to solve the problems encountered. They should develop strategies for text comprehension and text production in different stages of the process of mediation. The ability to use one's memory as efficiently as possible.

G. Note-taking is very important in consecutive interpretation therefore interpreters need to learn how to do that. Every interpreter should develop his own way of taking notes. Symbols and abbreviations that represent ideas are very useful tools that should be used instead of a word. Interpreters need to remember that even though abbreviations and symbols are useful tools, they should not be overused. Notes must be brief, clear, and accurate. They also need to remember that certain information must be written down such as proper names, technical terms, numbers, dates, figures, keywords, etc.

5. Conclusion

Becoming a proficient interpreter requires practice and commitment. Interpreters must make an effort to improve their interpreting skills, and cultural fluency and increase their knowledge in various areas and different fields of science. Interpretation requires teamwork, close collaboration, and a high level of trust. Interpreters are obligated to apply their best skills and judgment to preserve faithfully the style, register of speech, and meaning of what has been said. Interpreters should attend workshops, seminars, conferences, or courses to keep current with the changes in this field.

Interpreters need to bear in mind that interpreting is basically about communication. Therefore, they should not pay great attention to finding equivalences in the target language which is important to convey the intended meaning of the original language.

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