

AN APPROACH TO CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETING STRATEGIES IN THE ACADEMIC LANDSCAPE

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Ina SÎTNIC

Universitatea de Stat din Moldova

ORCID 0000-0002-8177-9866

The article aims at offering an outlook to strategic skills used as part of consecutive interpreting competence by second year undergraduates enrolled in the Translation and Interpreting study programme at the Department of Translation, Interpretation and Applied Linguistics. A sample of 20 students who performed the consecutive interpreting of 7 speeches yielded the information that in order to overcome specific difficulties in consecutive interpreting and to improve the quality of the target-speech students resort to strategies like literal translation, repair strategies or self-correction, repetition, speech expansion, stalling, generalisation, substitution, morphosyntactic transformation (conversion), explaining, condensation and approximation.

Keywords: *consecutive interpreting, interpreting strategy, strategic skill, interpreting competence, speech.*

O ABORDARE A STRATEGIILOR DE INTERPRETARE CONSECUTIVĂ ÎN MEDIUL ACADEMIC

Articolul oferă o privire asupra competențelor strategice utilizate ca parte a competenței de interpretare consecutivă de către studenții anului doi înrolați în Programul de studii traducere și interpretare la Departamentul traducere, interpretare și lingvistică aplicată. Un eșantion de 20 de studenți care au interpretat consecutiv 7 discursuri, ne-au furnizat informația potrivit căreia, în scopul depășirii unor dificultăți specifice de interpretare consecutivă și pentru îmbunătățirea calității discursului-țintă, studenții recurg la strategii precum traducere literală, strategii de reparare și auto-corectare, repetare, expansiune, amânare, generalizare, substituie, transformare morfosintactică (conversia), explicitare, condensare și aproximare.

Cuvinte-cheie: *interpretare consecutivă, strategie de interpretare, competență strategică, competență de interpretare, discurs.*

Introduction

Consecutive interpreting comprises a number of various cognitive, psychomotor and affective processes that translate into what D. Gile calls “efforts”, as all of them pose tremendous challenges in terms of cognitive load and not only. Interpreters constantly face unexpected situations that must be handled while they are already working at the limits of their available processing capacity [1]. Consequently, it is crucial that interpreter training is oriented towards activities that would look into types of strategies and tactics to overcome specific difficulties, to solve interpreting problems and overall to improve the quality of the final product of interpreting.

Interpreting strategy is a widely used concept, first introduced and defined by H. G. Hönic and P. Kussmaul [2] in 1982 as a process which leads to optimum solutions to translation problems. The specialised literature defines and explains the notion of interpreting strategy through the prism of interpreting problems that have to be dealt with during the process of interpreting. Thus, W. Lörcher [3, p. 125] considers the strategy to be a conscious and individual process used to solve a translation/interpreting problem. A. Hurtado [4, p. 246] defines interpreting strategies as conscious and unconscious, verbal and non-verbal individual procedures used by the translator/interpreter to solve the problems encountered in the interpreting process, depending on the specific requirements involved. D. Gile refers to interpreting strategies in terms of *tactics*, considering them as spontaneous decisions and actions taken by the interpreter in order to overcome difficulties [5, pp. 129-130]. According to H.P. Krings, strategies are “plans” aimed at solving specific interpreting

problems [6, p. 175]. At the same time, S. Kalina and D. Gile define them as procedures used with the aim of solving problems arising from the interpreter's limited processing capacity and knowledge gaps or with the aim of facilitating interpreting activity and preventing potential problems [7, p.253], [5, pp.129-130]. H. Kirchhoff characterises interpreting strategies in more general terms as the practical purpose of interpreting process research [8, p. 12].

While D. Gile [5] and W. Lörcher [3, p. 125] consider strategies to be conscious, intentional, individual procedures aimed at solving or preventing interpretation problems, S. Kalina and K. Kohn [9] question whether the application of strategies takes place with a certain degree of consciousness. We have used the term *strategy* in this paper to refer to the immediate actions taken by the students to overcome an interpreting difficulty (linguistic and extralinguistic in nature) and to improve the quality of the product of interpretation. It should be noted that the strategic skill is part of interpreting competence and should allow to identify interpreting difficulties and coordinate interpreting actions to overcome them and improve the quality of the target-speech.

Methodology and results

The purpose of this qualitative research analysis is to determine the interpreting strategies used to overcome possible difficulties encountered by second year undergraduates who have consecutive interpreting as part of their study programme at the Department of Translation, Interpretation and Applied Linguistics.

Twenty students took part in the study. They interpreted seven speeches selected from *Breaking News English*, *Speech Repository* and *American Rhetoric*. The findings were based on our analysis of a corpus of 140 target-speeches – the product of consecutive interpreting from English into Romanian. The method of presenting the speeches for interpretation consisted of speech segmentation into semantic units with an average duration of about 10 seconds each. We used this type of speech segmentation in order to facilitate memorisation and rendition in the target-language (TL) of as much information as possible for a more accurate target-speech. Also, due to the fact that students are novices in the practice of note-taking and they had not mastered the technique by the time they participated in the study, it seemed more appropriate that short speech segmentation would apply in this case. Students were asked to audio record their speeches so that we could further analyse and identify the strategies employed to overcome interpreting difficulties.

After having analysed the corpus of target-speeches, we determined that students resorted to the following interpreting strategies (presented in descending order of their use). ***Literal translation, repair strategies or self-correction, repetition, speech expansion, stalling strategies*** were more often employed by students, while ***generalisation, substitution, morphosyntactic transformation (conversion), explaining, condensation*** and ***approximation*** were used to a lesser degree.

As follows, we shall present excerpts from the interpreted speeches in order to demonstrate how students put the strategies to use. We shall explain, in short, what each strategy represents and what difficulties they were used to overcome.

Literal translation consists of rendering source speech segments into the TL through syntactic literalism and semantic equivalence [10, pp.162-154]. Although English and Romanian belong to two different language families, direct translation (here, literal translation) was appropriate in message rendition in the example below.

- *Artefacts tell us that violent conflict appeared with the very first man.*
- *Artifactele ne spun că conflictul violent a apărut de la primul om.*

Repair or self-correction is employed to correct errors in the interpreting process. The student understands the error and decides to correct it immediately:

- *On every continent, the history of civilization is filled with war [...].*
- *Pe fiecare continent civilizațiile sunt acaparate de război– Pe fiecare continent istoria civilizației este plină de război [...].*

Repetition represents the reiteration of a lexeme by means of synonymous structures, with the aim of gaining time needed to express the meaning or to amplify lexical accuracy [10, p.121].

➤ [...] unele persoane se pot **într-un fel** conecta cu protagoniștii din seriale [...] **într-un fel** se conectează cu acesta. [...] acest program are ca scop– **într-un fel** [...].

The repetition of the structure “*într-un fel*” lies in the difficulty of expressing an idea that cannot be conveyed in enough words. The frequent use of the respective structure is associated with the speaker’s limited vocabulary, slow speed of transforming thoughts into words and difficulty of understanding meaning.

Expansion consists of adding information for the purpose of expanding the source-speech in order to clarify the message and avoid linguistic obscurity in the target-speech [10, p.15].

➤ *Many of the students in the crowd wanted to remind President Donald Trump that they would be old enough to vote in the 2020 elections, so he should listen to them now.*

➤ *Mulți studenți din mulțime i-au reamintit președintelui Donald Trump că în anul 2020 ei vor– ei vor avea vârsta necesară pentru a vota și de aceea **el trebuie să le asculte cerințele**.*

Stalling is an interpreting strategy that delays rephrasing in the TL by producing pauses which are absent in the target-speech until the interpreter recalls appropriate lexemes, numerical information, proper names, etc. Frequent use of pauses, especially vocal pauses, is detrimental to good quality of the target-speech and can be extremely distracting for the listening audience.

➤ *Venim să comemorăm forța teribilă (2,5) dezlănțuită într-un trecut nu prea îndepărtat.*

In the sentence above the message is expressed by a deliberate delay of reformulation (the integrated filled pause of 2.5 seconds) in the TL, producing non-vocalic pauses which are absent in the target-speech, until the appropriate linguistic structures are recalled.

Generalisation is manifested by rendering a specific term (hyponym) in the source-speech by a general term (hyperonym) in the target-speech. The strategy is used in situations where suitable equivalents cannot be found in the process of interpreting, when the student is pressed for time or by certain hostile conditions of interpretation [10, p.81].

➤ *Our early ancestors, having learned to make **blades from flint and spears from wood** [...].*

➤ *Strămoșii noștri au inventat **săgeata** și (4) alți– **alte arme** [...].*

Substitution is an interpreting strategy in which the student-interpreter uses linguistic structures that are more or less plausible to the context, or substitutes elements that s/he does not understand with available ones, in order not to intervene with pauses in the TL and not to possibly interrupt the utterance [3].

➤ *U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren joined the crowds **and spoke at a rally outside the Capitol building**.*

➤ *Senatorul [ăă] Elizavet Warren s-a alăturat mulțimii și a luat parte la o întâlnire care (2) **care s-a întâmplat atunci**.*

Morphosyntactic transformation (conversion) is the strategy by which the interpreter tries to distance himself from the surface structures of the original speech and decides to express the meaning of the message through different syntactic constructions [11].

➤ *Artifacts tell us that violent conflict appeared with **the very first man**.*

➤ *Artifacetele ne arată că conflictele violente au apărut încă **de la primii oameni**.*

Although the student changed the grammatical category by substituting the noun “*man*” in the singular with the noun “*oameni*” in the plural, the meaning of the statement was not altered.

Explaining refers to rephrasing in the TL the intended source-speech meaning of a lexical unit when the interpreter has difficulty in momentarily recalling the TL equivalent [10, p.72].

➤ *Firstly, supporters say that uniform is **a great leveler** [...].*

➤ *În primul rând suporterii consideră că aceasta este **o metodă perfectă de [ăă] a (3) minimaliza discrepanțele** [...].*

Condensation is an interpreting strategy whereby an idea is expressed in the TL in a more general and concise manner than in the SL, usually to remove cumbersome expressions, unnecessary repetitive, unimportant or redundant linguistic elements, pleonasm or awkward stylistic expressions (adapted from G. Lungu-Badea) [10, p.68].

➤ *Seventy-one years ago, on **a bright, cloudless morning**, death fell from the sky and the world was changed.*

➤ *În urmă cu 71 de ani într-o dimineață senină moartea a căzut din cer schimbând cursul total al lumii și al istoriei.*

In the example above the concise expression in Romanian is rendered through a single descriptive element “senin” which translates into English as “cloudless, bright”.

Approximation involves the use of a term close to the original, a synonym, or a less accurate version of it in the target-speech. It consists in avoiding the transposition of exact information from the SL into the TL and resorting instead to more imprecise constructions. The causes of approximation go beyond the mere absence of precise information, with the student deliberately approximating to camouflage the difficulty of recalling exact information.

➤ *Strămoșii noștri foloseau diferite unelte pentru hrană și pentru unele fapte.*

The student used the adjectives “diferite” and “unele” with a quantitative meaning in order to replace the information that s/he failed to store in short-term memory or to recall it in a timely manner.

The approximation in the example below is due to the difficulty of recalling numerical information:

➤ *Ninety percent of the forcibly displaced are from poor or middle-income countries.*

➤ *Altă majoritate de refugiați provine din țările sărace sau în curs de dezvoltare.*

The interpretation strategies used by students at the initial stage of training show that they possess strategic skills, which supported them in overcoming problematic situations associated with economical transposition of discourse segments, difficulties in rephrasing, identifying appropriate versions for certain lexical units, recalling the connotative meaning of certain lexemes, understanding the connotative meaning, recalling proper names and numerical information, rendering the stylistic effect of figures of speech, deciphering information represented by graphic representations, symbols and abbreviations. It is difficult to determine to what extent the strategies employed by the students when faced with consecutive interpreting difficulties are conscious and deliberate, or whether they are unconscious, spontaneous actions and reactions in response to a difficulty.

From our observations, most of the interpreting strategies used by the students are related to the temporal aspect for expressing the message. Students fail to render ideas in a timely manner or to recall certain lexical units, therefore some of them use generalisation, substitution, concision. At the same time, stalling and repetition are strategies for gaining time to recall key information. Other aspects that students emphasise in consecutive interpreting through the use of interpreting strategies are: completeness of the message (when information is not to be omitted), discursive fluency (so as not to intervene with pauses and hesitations) ensured through approximation and substitution, and clarity of ideas conveyed through strategies such as explaining, expansion and morphosyntactic transformation.

Conclusions

The findings of our research showed that the most frequently used strategies by students are literal translation, repetition, repair strategies (self-correction), speech expansion, stalling, followed by the lesser use of concision, approximation, explaining, morphosyntactic transformation (conversion), condensation, substitution and generalisation. The fact that students employed different interpreting strategies at this stage of their training indicates that they possess a certain level of strategic skill which they are able to apply in order to overcome critical situations associated with consecutive interpreting difficulties. Good knowledge of the interpreting process helps to identify interpreting strategies to improve and deliver a good product.

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