Lecture

Module 1: General Principles in Training Translators and Interpreters

Lecture 2: Main features of Simultaneous Interpretation

Plan of the lecture

1. Introduction
2. Tactics in simultaneous interpreting
3. Conclusion
4. References

Aspects of the lecture

1. Effort Models by Daniel Gile
2. The Listening and analysis Effort
3. The Production Effort
4. Memory Effort

Goals of the lecture

1. Introduce main tenets SI
2. Explain basic training technique
3. Familiarize with linguistic problem triggers
4. Highlight the importance of extra-linguistic factors

Basic concepts

Speech comprehension, short-term storage tactics, cognitive load, coding, decoding, linguistically ambiguous structures, background information, speech-producer and etc.

- "that wasn't my fault" was interpreted into "*c'est ma faute*" ("it is my fault")
- "the Vietnamese government" was interpreted into "*les gouvernements*" ("the governments")
- by one interpreter, and into "*le gouvernement chinois*" ('the Chinese government')

- by another "and you think they think you're foolish" was interpreted into "*vous pensez qu'ils sont idiots*" ("you think they are stupid")

The Listening and analysis Effort (or 'Listening Effort' for short) was defined as consisting of all comprehension-oriented operations, from the subconscious analysis of the sound waves 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. In signed language interpreting, a parallel Viewing and Analysis Effort can be defined when the interpreter works from a signed language into a spoken language.

Actually, interpreters know that interpreting involves much more than speech recognition. Some kind of semantic representation of the content of source speeches is always present, which includes plausibility analyses and probably some **anticipation**. Chernov (1973) conducted an experiment in which he made students interpret sentences that seemed to be leading in a certain direction and then veered off to an unexpected ending. He found they were usually interpreted according to the direction they were taking initially, not as they finally turned out to end. His subjects not only identified words, but also made inferences about their meaning and anticipated on-line.

This is the name given here to the 'output part' of interpreting. In simultaneous interpreting, it can be defined as the set of operations extending from the mental representation of the message to be delivered to speech planning and the performance of the speech plan, including self-monitoring and self-correction when necessary. As in speech comprehension, the impression of effortlessness in speech production is deceptive. Matthei and Roeper stress that (1985: 114),

- *… the fact that virtually all people make many false starts, add ums and ahs, and often speak ungrammatically, suggests that production may be making quite a number of very substantial demands on our linguistic systems.*

During interpreting, short-term memory operations (up to a few seconds) succeed each other without interruption. Some are due to the lag between the moment speech sounds are heard and the moment they are interpreted: phonetic segments may have to be added up in memory and analyzed until they allow identification of a word or phoneme.

To take only one example, when spelling a name and saying "D as in Denmark," phonetic features of the sound carrying 'D' may have to be held in memory until the word 'Denmark' is recognized, which makes it possible to recognize 'D' as opposed to 'T'.

Possible language-specific differences in production are more difficult to pinpoint

than possible difficulties in comprehension: production depends on the individual interpreter's selection of linguistic 'tools' (essentially lexical units and grammatical structures) most available to him/her, and less on the selection of linguistic components by the speaker being interpreted as in the case of comprehension – though the speaker's choice of lexical units and grammatical structures probably 'primes' cognate units and structures in the target language and therefore does influence the interpreter's production to a certain extent.

Besides speech-producer dependent factors, selecting lexical items and grammatical decision-making may be more difficult in some languages than in others because of differences in the variety of possible choices and in the flexibility of linguistic rules: a wide set of lexical items to choose from as opposed to a more restricted one, flexible or rigid lexical usage, the strength of collocations, the number of possible escape routes in sentence structuring in case the source language statement goes in an unexpected direction and forces one to reconsider one's options. The subjective impression of many interpreters is that English is more flexible than French and that Japanese is more flexible than English, with convenient escape routes up to the end of the sentence, but I am not aware of research which has demonstrated that such differences have practical implications. Nevertheless, the possibility that they matter cannot be ruled out at this time. There may also be differences in working memory load depending on grammatical agreement and other dependencies between various parts of the sentence which may require speakers to store grammatical information (such as gender or singular and plural or a particular verb tense) for a shorter or longer time when constructing sentences.

Follow-up questions

1. Describe Culture-specific difficulties in interpreting speech in English/Kazakh/Russian
2. Describe translation problems caused due to lack thereof between the source language and the target language in lexical, syntactic, and general informational terms.
3. Speak about influence of national background of the speakers on quality of interpretation

References

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