

Error Analysis applied in Note-taking Research of Conference Consecutive Interpreting

Zihui Wang,
PhD student in Swansea University,
supervised by Dr. Patricia Rodriguez-Martinez & Dr. Sabrina
United Kingdom
806131@swansea.ac.uk

Abstract.

Note-taking, an indispensable tool in Consecutive Interpreting plays an important role in supporting interpreters' memory. This paper is based on several significant studies in Consecutive Interpreting and focuses on exploring Note-taking skills that can be applied in business domain. With a well-established theoretical framework, this paper aims to reveal the significance of Note-taking in Consecutive Interpreting. Previous researches have revealed several basic rules of Note-taking skill in Consecutive Interpreting (Noting the idea and not the word, Abbreviation, Links, Negation, etc.), however, no studies have investigated particular aspects of Note-taking in English to Mandarin language combination within the field of Consecutive Interpreting in Business Domain. In the meantime, this work intends to apply Error analysis method to analyze interpreters' output, in the meantime, trying to find out the relationship between the notes and output.

Keywords: Note-taking, Consecutive Interpreting, Error Analysis, Empirical Research

Note-taking research background

The researches of Note-taking skills of interpreting have been developed in the past decades, most of the researches are focus on giving advises on what interpreting notes should look like and how note-taking should be taught based on interpreters' personal experiences (Dam, Interpreters' notes: On the choice of language, 2004). The first note-taking system was put forward by Rozan in 1956, then was followed by different researchers in different languages, for example, Baker (1972), Kirchhoff (1979), Gran (1982), Ilg (1988), Allioni (1989), Matyssek (1989) and Gillies (2005, 2017 & 2018).

The principles put forward by Rozan (2004) provided a sound basis and precision definition and enabled interpreters to use them straightforwardly. There are seven of these principles; in order, they are:

- Noting the idea and not the word
- The rules of abbreviation
- Links
- Negation
- Adding emphasis
- Verticality
- Shift

Rule No.1 'noting the idea and not the word' is reminding interpreters to concentrate on the ideas not the language when they are taking notes. Rule No. 2 – 'abbreviation'; if the interpreters have enough time they should note down words as completely as possible, but if not, interpreters should use an abbreviation to replace the original idea. In this process, interpreters should better note down the first and last few letters from the source language word, rather than trying to write as many letters as possible from the start onwards. The interpreter should also pay attention to the GENDER and VERB TENSE. Rule No. 3 is about the logic of the original speech - the interpreter should note 'links' by using the key words; links are not just about representing the idea - they also imply the group of words to which the idea relates. Negation and Emphasis mean taking notes by using a line through a word or symbol or underlining it. Verticality means taking notes from top to bottom rather than from left to right on the note pad. Consecutive interpreters should try to group the ideas logically, allowing a complete and immediate synthesis when they come to read back their notes. Using 'shift' offers vertical layout notes on the page (Rozan, 2017). The most important rules given by Rozan are that long words should not be noted down in full or noted from the first letter; they should be noted by the first and last letters or, if the word is short, by the first three letters, followed by a full stop. A full stop after an abbreviation indicates that a word has been cut down to a shorter word instead of writing it in full, for instance, Sep. indicates September, but if an abbreviation contains a final letter of a word, then it won't stop by a full stop, as Dr for Doctor.

Another empirical work of Andrew Gillies (2005), involves the general understanding of Consecutive Interpreting, the step-by-step introduction of a note-taking system, techniques that can be used in the note-taking

skills development as well as some examples (Gillies, 2005). Links imply the logic between what is about to be said and what has been said before in a speech (Baker, 2011). When interpreters are interpreting the speech, they should focus on the ideas and the links between the ideas. A speech could be a meaningless list of ideas without logic, and that is the reason why interpreters should try their best to identify the links in the speech (Gillies, 2005). In this work, Gillies provides three ways to help interpreters practice taking notes: a) Taking notes directly; b) Reproducing speeches from notes; c) Note-taking from the spoken word. There are a number of benefits for interpreters when taking notes directly from the speech, because there is no time pressure as with the spoken word, so the interpreters have more time to consider the rendition and to deliver the message. In this way, it means that the interpreter should practise what they need to note. The next step is to reproduce speeches from their notes, which means that the interpreters should use the notes they have made from the speech, which involves subject, verb, object units and the links between them, and then try to reproduce, orally, a version of the source speech, either in the same language or in a target language. Gillies (2005) also mentioned that the symbols used in the notes do not have to be a picture; it can also be a short word, a pair of letters or a single letter. Symbols are quicker and easier for interpreters to note and read, and interpreters should also notice that symbols often represent concepts not words - symbols are not one-to-one translations, so they help interpreters to avoid source language interference when interpreting (Gillies, 2005).

In *The Interpreter's Resource*, Phelan discusses different types of Interpreting (2001). According to Phelan, the term "Conference Interpreting" refers to the use of Consecutive or Simultaneous Interpreting at a conference or a meeting. Nowadays, Simultaneous Interpreting is far more common and is used almost exclusively in international organizations. Conference Interpreting is the most prestigious form of Interpreting and the most financially rewarding (Phelan). For Consecutive Interpreting, interpreters take notes while listening to a speech and deliver the speech in his or her native language. Usually, the interpretation is not a summary unless the speaker has requested the interpreter to do so; otherwise, it is a complete rendition of the original speech in another language. Note-taking is considered as the central skill in Consecutive Interpreting and interpreters often have their own techniques for note-taking. Some consecutive interpreters prefer to use symbols while others do not. The most important feature of interpreter's notes is that each individual's notes would probably be totally unintelligible to any other note-taker. Some interpreters even manage to write down practically everything they hear, analyse the speech and its theme or argument. Phelan believes that most interpreters take notes in the target language rather than the source language, as this approach saves time and effort when the time comes to deliver the interpretation. This approach also helps the interpreter to make a conscious effort to move away from the structures and expressions of the source language.

Chinese researcher Wei Lu, from Jiangxi Normal University, put forward some practical advice for consecutive interpreters, especially for Chinese-English Consecutive Interpreting (LU, 2013). In her work, she presented several practical hints from some veteran interpreters:

- 1) Write as few words or symbols as possible;
- 2) Better to take notes in the target language;
- 3) See to it that the notes are logical and legible;
- 4) Note-taking in interpreting should not take the form of shorthand;
- 5) Memory is expected to work simultaneously with note-taking (Lu, 2013, pp. 77-78).

However, some of this advice seems contrary to other scholars' studies; for instance, Lu believes note-taking in Interpreting should not take the form of shorthand. By contrast, Nolan advised that interpreters could learn a shorthand system or speed-writing skill in the target or source language. There is controversy in relation to these points; also, should the interpreter use the source or target language to take notes? It is hoped that this research finds a better answer for Chinese-English consecutive interpreters.

On the other hand, Heping Liu believes that the interpreting process is actually an intelligent transformation of language and emotion, and repression through another language. Consecutive Interpreting has a high requirement of memory ability against transformation from source language into target language. As the limitation of human memory, a remarkable interpreting task depends to a large extent on the interpreting notes (2008). Taking notes could help interpreters reduce a memory and psychological burden (2008).

Moreover, an online interpreter training video posted on YouTube named "Note-taking for consecutive interpretation: an introduction", which was recorded at the Centre de Conférences by Albert Borschette in Brussels in November 1999 in English (Roche, 1999), states that the process of interpreting is to "convey someone else's ideas" (1999). Interpreting is an activity which involves movement - it is a dynamic activity and the interpreter has to be constantly on the move along with the speaker, whose thoughts interpreters have to interpret (1999). Roche proposed five questions to make sure that interpreters could do justice to the speaker's ideas; they are: "WHY? WHERE? WHEN? WHAT? and HOW?". 1) Why interpreters note? - is it to relieve the strain of interpreter's memory? 2) Where do interpreters note? - Ideally note on the note pad. Interpreters should be as generous as they want to be to the paper they were given. 3) When to note? - Interpreters note down, once an idea has clearly taken shape in their mind. 4) What to note? - The main ideas of a speech. 5) How to note? - Use symbols and abbreviations to take down the notes to help interpreters remember the speech.

Experiment Conduction

The research methods applied in this research is to examine interpreters' notes under a laboratory condition. Research on interpreters' notes has a long tradition in the history of Interpreting Studies, but very little empirical work has been conducted on this matter. Gile (1998) suggested that researchers should generate the experimental process under controlled conditions in terms of situations and phenomena for the specific purpose of study.

An authentic, audio-recorded public speech (for the transcript of the speech, please see Appendix B) from a Business Conference was used as part of the experimental component of this study. The speech topic was *How to Win on Google Adwords in This Changing World*, delivered by official staff of Google Adwords at the Introbiz Expo Fair, Cardiff, UK, 2017, which this researcher attended. The source speech is a 9-minute long text, 1150-word speech in English, and since the background sound is hustle and bustle, the research asked a native speaker to re-record the content in English. In addition, the new recording provided a quiet environment for participants, so that they could focus on note-taking and not be distracted by external factors. All participants were native speakers of Mandarin Chinese and English was their second language.

This study wanted to attenuate the methodological criticism that will be derived from the actual fact that the taken knowledge would be obtained in a very laboratory scenario (where the topic wouldn't have a way of reality in terms of taking part in a very real conference). Although Gile (1998) criticized the fact that collecting the data in a lab situation may undermine the validity of the data sample, it is also worth noting that lab-based experiments allow for a tight control of other variables. In the present experiment, for instance, the participants were not allow to re-start if they made any mistake during the interpreting stage.

Following initial contact with the participants, they were provided a bilingual glossary and a brief introduction of the source speech one week before the experiment was carried out. These materials would allow participants to anticipate the overarching topic. Although this decision may allow some participants to develop certain symbols before the experiment, this possibility should be seen as part of the normal preparation process that most interpreters go through before a professional interpreting assignment.

In addition, the researcher followed the procedures set out by Swansea University, which requires that participants sign the consent form before conducting the experiment. The briefing in English, which, overall, did not exceed 10 minutes, also covered ethical issues, such as confidentiality, data protection and the participants' right to withdraw at any time.

After the experiment, the researcher first transcribed the audio recordings of the whole experiment, then extracted those fragment that had been selected to illustrate the analysis using error analysis criteria. The transcript of the interpreting output was compared with the notes in order to clarify the contribution of participants' notes to meaning-making in the context of business consecutive conference interpreting.

Error Analysis

Error analysis is an experimental technique for validating the theory of transfer (Corder, 1981, p. 35), the author of the present research hopes to able to draw certain conclusions about the strategies adopted by the interpreters in the process of interpreting. In the field of Consecutive Interpreting, and the pedagogical intentions of the present research, the analysis methods of the most frequent occurring types of error are applied in this research (Sylvie Lambert, Barbara Moser-Mercer, 1994). There are several common error types in Consecutive Interpreting attributed to the Chinese-English language combination.

Omission. Omission has been amply adopted in many translation studies. It occurs when translators have not translated, i.e., omitted important content from the source-text in their target text (Dimitriu, 2004). The term Omission, as stated, refers to the elements that exist in the source speech which are left out of the interpretation in the target speech (Barik, 1971).

Omission has been amply commented upon in many translation studies; it occurs when the interpreter has not translated, i.e., omitted something form the source text in their target text (Dimitriu, Omission in Translation, 2004). The term Omission, as stated, refers to the elements that exist in the source speech which are left out of the interpretation in the target speech (Barik, A Description of Various Type of Omissions, Additions and Errors of Translation Encountered in Simultaneous Interpretation., 1971). Here we are dealing with clear omissions and not omissions resulting from the substitution of one thing for another by the interpreter, the latter fall under the category of substitutions and/or errors. Omissions are determined on the basis of the final content of the original message, so that it is not considered an omission if the interpreter does not translate a lexically irrelevant repetition or 'false start' on the part of the speaker or source speech. According to Barik, omission can be

categorized as **Skipping Omission**, **Comprehension Omission** and **Compounding Omission**. In addition to these omission types above, there are some other omitted materials in the interpreting process: a) omission of connective 'and' between words, phrases or sentences, where its omission is not disruptive; b) omission of superfluous and often untranslatable material, in the form of fillers.

References:

- Baker, M. (2011). *In other words: A coursebook on translation*. Routledge.
- Barik, H. C. (1971). A Description of Various Types of Omissions, Additions and Errors of Translation Encountered in Simultaneous Interpretation. *Meta*, 16(4), 199-210.
- Dam, H. V. (2004). Interpreters' notes on the choice of language. *Interpreting*, 3-17.
- Dimitriu, R. (2004). Omission in Translation. *Perspectives: Studies in Translation and Practice*, 12(3), 163-175.
- Gile, D. (1998). Observational studies and experimental studies in the investigation of conference interpreting. *Target. International Journal of Translation Studies*, 10(1), 69-93.
- Gillies, A. (2005). *Note-Taking for consecutive interpreting - A short course*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
- Halliday, M. (1978). *Language as social semiotic : the social interpretation of language and meaning*.
- Janzen, T. (Ed.). (2005). *Topics in Signed Language Interpreting: Theory and Practice*. University of Manitoba: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Joos, M. (1967). *The five clocks*. 58.
- Leckie-Tarry, H. (1993). The specification of a text: Register, genre and language teaching. In H. Leckie-Tarry, *Register analysis: Theory and practice* (pp. 26-42).
- Lu, W. (2013). Developing note-taking skills in consecutive interpreting. *Linguist*, 72-81.
- Phelan, M. (2001). *The interpreter's resource* (Vol. 19). Multilingual Matters.
- Roche, N (1999, November). Retrieved from YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Z-AmvDMDN8>
- Rozan, J. F., & Hrehorowicz, U. (2004). Note-taking in consecutive interpreting. A. Gillies, & B. Waliczek (Eds.). *Cracow tertium society for the promotion of language studies*.
- Rozan and 7 Principles | Language Interpretation | Word. (2017). Scribd. Retrieved 10 March 2017, from: <https://www.scribd.com/document/249245616/Roz-an-7-Principles>
- Sylvie Lambert, Barbara Moser-Mercer. (1994, 07 01). (S. Lambert, & B. Moser-Mercer, Eds.) Retrieved 05 01, 2018, from ProQuest:
<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com>