Ain Shams University
Faculty of Al-Alsun
Department of English

The Decision-Making Process in Interpreting Political Speeches: A Pragmatic-Narrative Approach

A Ph.D. Thesis

By

Sama Dawood Salman

Under the supervision of

Dr. Soheir Mohamed Gamal El Din Mahfouz
Associate Professor of Linguistics, Translation
and Simultaneous Interpretation
Department of English
Faculty of Al-Alsun
Ain Shams University

Dr. Amal Abdul Maqsoud
Lecturer of Linguistics, Translation
and Simultaneous Interpretation
Department of English
Faculty of Al-Alsun
Ain Shams University

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Summary

The decision making process (DMP) in simultaneous interpreting (SI) remains poorly understood and largely overlooked in SI studies today. Most of the studies conducted give only glimpses of this cognitive process, ignoring its far-reaching implications. The phenomenon of DMP in SI is complex and plays a critical role in interpretation. It is foiled by many constraints that dictate the decisions that the interpreters make. Simultaneous interpreters' behavior is conditioned by their keenness on communicating the source language (SL) message quickly with minimal loss. To achieve this goal, they make numerous communicative decisions that are dictated by a wide range of factors beyond their sphere of influence; these factors include the topic of the speech, rate of delivery, information density, the nature of the language used, the ideological considerations of the institution they belong to, and the audience expectations. The decision to use a given SI strategy is directly dependent on the constraints imposed by the context of the interaction. The more serious the context is, the more stressful the job becomes for the interpreters, and the more literal they go in order to absolve themselves of any responsibility.

Language of political speeches - more than that of any other genre - has a reality-making effect. It is deliberately structured to mould how people see events. Through the strategic employment of language, politicians try to shape the public perception of the world. Many studies have been conducted on the way politicians use language to enlist the support of the public and to generate consent for their battles, attempting to anchor their own interpretation of events and to drown out other sounds. One effective way of doing so is the utilization of all sorts of emotionally loaded language (ELL). Metaphors, euphemisms, religious quotes and images, hyperbole, and the use of value-laden lexical items can all aid politicians achieve their goals. Therefore, when an interpreter renders what the politician says- including the ELL used- s/he contributes to

privileging the politician's viewpoint of others. That is why it is said that SI is highly influential in conflicts since it can be used for good and for ill.

Interpreters' performance is usually delivered live to the target language (TL) audience and is, therefore, subject to monitoring. The interpreter is required to convey the thoughts, intentions and opinions of the speaker to the TL audience faithfully and professionally. After all, the audience desires a faithful rendition of what the speaker wants them to grasp. However, in some circumstances, interpreters fail to do so either due to lack of the required skills and competence, or to difficulties of the input, or due to both factors. In such cases, they opt for some compensatory strategies. The decision to use a given strategy rather than another is neither randomly done nor smoothly made. The interpreter has to go through a quick DMP to decide on the strategy that guarantees the minimal loss. Deletion, compression, approximation, and anticipation are the most common strategies that this study found interpreters use when they encounter ELL. This thesis discusses the negative and positive effects of each of these strategies within an interdisciplinary approach that is based on Speech Act Theory (SAT), Cooperative Principle (CP), Politeness Principle (PP) and Narrative Theory (NT). The study shows that in most cases the interpreters decide to overlook the ELL employed in the SL utterance. This is to a large extent justified on the ground of their striving to preserve as much as they can of the utterance's semantic content.

The first chapter of this thesis reviews the literature on the key issues addressed including the DMP in translation and interpretation, the role of the interpreter and the conventional SI coping techniques. The review also covers the theories and notions that constitute the basis of the corpus analysis, namely, SAT, CP, PP, and NT. Furthermore, the chapter sheds light on the most

significant studies that have been conducted on the language of politics after 9/11 with special emphasis on the use of ELL employed in political speeches.

The second chapter discusses the theoretical framework of the study. It tackles SAT and the two pragmatic conventions CP and PP in an attempt to show the interplay between SI and pragmatics, and to stress that successful interpretation means the match between what the interpreter conveys to the audience and what the speaker means. The chapter also throws light on the NT as a major theory at work in political interpreting, and as a vital component of the interdisciplinary approach the study suggests to investigate the DMP. Moreover, the chapter introduces a model for the DMP in SI, underscoring its steps, the factors influencing it, and its consequences on the interaction among the three parties to the mediated event. This chapter also discusses the methodology of the study, the subjects, as well as the material used.

The third chapter covers the empirical part of the study which is the analysis of the data collected during the mock sessions. The input of the speaker and the output of the two subjects are analyzed within a pragmatic-narrative framework, putting the suggested DMP model to the test. The chapter ends with a discussion of the SI strategies that the subjects decided to use when dealing with the ELL, shedding light on their consequences on the interaction as a whole. Moreover, it gives an overview of the main characteristics of the DMP in SI derived from the analysis of the data at hand.

Finally, the conclusion of the study underlines the findings that surfaced after the analysis of the data. The study reveals that simultaneous interpreters, due to the stress they work under, are likely to sacrifice the narrative and pragmatic dimensions of the SL message in order to transfer the semantic meaning. This, however, does not refer to lack of awareness on the part of

interpreters. Usually this is a decision they consciously make as they are trained to give priority to the semantic content. After all, due to the nature of SI, it is not always possible to convey everything, and decisions about priorities must be made on the spot. Therefore, the study recommends that interpreters of political discourse be given extra time after interpreting sessions to explain to the TL audience any shades of meaning implied by the speaker's linguistic choices. Commentary is important because it distances interpreters from the attitude of the speaker to avoid being accused of putting their interpreting skills at the service of a given political agenda. Only then will the interpreters be said to have carried out their job effectively, enabling mutual understanding between the sender of the message and the receiver. Moreover, the study recommends incorporating the pragmatic and narrative dimensions into the training of the simultaneous interpreters of political discourse. The conclusion of the study highlights the importance of envisaging a theory of SI that understands the challenges that interpreters face.

Abstract

Simultaneous interpreting is a field that poses many challenges to those who practice it. To meet these challenges, interpreters have to make vital decisions and assume full responsibility of the decisions they make, right or wrong. While going through the mental process of decision-making, interpreters get influenced by a number of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors that steer the process leading to preference of one decision over another. This study aims at exploring the decision-making process involved in simultaneous interpretation and the factors that get in the way, as well as finding how far interpreters' decisions can affect the intended message of the speaker and the way the Target Audience receive the message. This is achieved through analyzing the utterances of both the speaker and the interpreter according to a pragmatic-narrative approach. Four theories and conventions form the basis of this approach, namely, Austin's Speech Act Theory (1962), Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975), Leech's Politeness Principle (1983), and Baker's Narrative Theory (2006). The analysis covers the communicative force of the Source Language utterance, the communicative behavior of the speaker and the interpreter and the effects of this behavior on the pragmatic and narrative aspects of the Source Language message and the Target Audience. Believing that interpreting political texts plays an extremely significant role in forming the public understanding of ideologies, policies and cultural image, and that, therefore, any decision interpreters make in this discourse probably has far reaching consequences on all the participants involved in the interaction, the study explores the decisions made by two professional interpreters when rendering four American presidential speeches into Arabic, with a special focus on the emotionally-loaded language employed in these speeches. The study shows that the stressful atmosphere in which interpreters usually work directs their decision making process, forcing them to decide upon using certain simultaneous interpretation techniques. These techniques, most of the time, undermine the communicative force of the Source Language utterance. The study underlines the need for well-designed interpreting training programs that further help would-be interpreters fully realize their role as active mediators whose responsibility includes accounting for not only the semantic meaning of utterances, but their pragmatic and narrative aspects as well. It is hoped that this study, through investigating the decision making process involved in simultaneous interpreting, contributes to design an interpreting theory that takes into account the challenges of this profession, and further highlights the significant role played by interpreters in inter-cultural interaction.

Keywords:
Simultaneous interpretation, political interpreting, decision-making process, pragmatics, narrative theory

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List of Abbreviations

CP	**Cooperative Principle**
DMP	**Decision Making Process**
ELEs	**Emotionally Loaded Expressions**
ELL	**Emotionally Loaded Language**
NT	**Narrative Theory**
PP	**Politeness Principle**
SAT	**Speech Act Theory**
SI	**Simultaneous Interpretation/Interpreting**
SL	**Source Language**
TL	**Target Language**

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Introduction

Statement of the Research Problem

      Although some researchers have written about the decision-making process (DMP) in written translation, little has been said about this vital cognitive process in simultaneous interpretation (SI). Moreover, most of the research conducted on the process tends to approach it from a purely psychological perspective, focusing on the mental steps that take place in the interpreters' minds before they make an utterance. The study of the factors that influence the DMP and the effects of interpreters' decisions while interpreting on the intended pragmatic and narrative aspects of the utterance is still an area that needs further investigation.

      Therefore, the present study investigates this process within the boundaries of a pragmatic-narrative framework in order to show that interpreters' communicative decisions are determined by a number of constraints, and that they have consequences on all the parties to the interaction.

Importance of the Study

      Since in normal SI situations, interpreters are the only participants with access to both languages, they can control the interaction to a great extent. Their communicative behavior and the decisions they make affect the message that will be received by the Target Language (TL) audience. Therefore, identifying the factors impacting interpreters' decisions and examining the way their decisions affect the intended message of the speaker and, consequently, the TL audience need to be carefully analyzed. The significance of looking into the interpreters' DMP is further evident in the light of the brainwashing techniques that politicians nowadays use through twisting language to serve their intentions. This fact brings about the question of whether

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interpreters should be allowed to intervene in the message of the speaker in order not to circulate a biased attitude, or they should stay as faithful as possible to the speaker, maintaining their image as honest, detached intermediaries.

This study is an attempt to investigate the factors that govern the DMP in SI from English into Arabic and the effects of interpreters' decisions on the Source Language (SL) utterance within a pragmatic-narrative framework that is based on Austin's Speech Act Theory (1962), Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975), Leech's Politeness Principle (1983), and Baker's Narrative Theory (2006).

Aim of the Study

The present study aims at exploring the DMP in SI from English into Arabic through identifying the constraints that influence the communicative behavior of interpreters in the political discourse in terms of the SI strategies they decide to adopt to render the emotionally-loaded language (ELL) employed, and the effects of their communicative decisions on the pragmatic and narrative aspects of the SL utterance. This is done through analyzing the input of the speaker and the output of the interpreters according to Austin's Speech Act Theory (1962), Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975), Leech's Politeness Principle (1983), and Baker's Narrative Theory (2006).

The findings of the study shed light on the question of fidelity and whether or not interpreters should have the right to intervene in the speakers' intended message in the political discourse. They also underline the importance for SI training programs to view SI as a cognitive DMP that is subject to a number of factors, and leads to far-reaching consequences.

Research Questions

Based on the assumption that the DMP in SI is complicated, and that it is subject to external and internal factors, the following research questions are investigated:

1) Is the DMP in political interpreting a systemized process where interpreters' communicative behavior could be analyzed and justified according to Austin's Speech Act Theory (1962), Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975) and Leech's Politeness Principle (1983) and Baker's Narrative Theory (2006)?

2) How far can stress affect the DMP in SI and force the interpreter to follow certain SI strategies?

3) How far can the interpreter's decisions affect the pragmatic dimension and the frame of the SL message and the way it is perceived by the TL audience?

4) To what extent interpreters are allowed to interfere in the pragmatic and narrative aspects of the SL message?

Scope of the Study

This is an expository research that focuses on analyzing the decisions interpreters make when interpreting the ELL employed in a number of English political speeches into Arabic. Politicians intend to use such language because it helps them produce certain effects on the audience. Accordingly, if those effects are not reproduced on the TL audience, the interpreter will be blamed for misrepresenting the speaker's intentions.

This study limits the scope of research to four speeches by the American former president George W. Bush, that greatly manifest how ELL can be used to twist the public opinion: "A Great People Has Been Moved to Defend a Great Nation" on September 11th, 2001, Congress

speech on September 20th, 2001, "Operation Iraqi Freedom" address to the nation on March 19th, 2003 and "Towards Freedom" address to the Iraqis on April 10th, 2003. These speeches are all significant, as each one of them was delivered at a special historical moment with the intention of manipulating the public opinion.

Two professional interpreters were recruited to interpret these four speeches. The decisions they made to handle the ELL are described and the extent to which their decisions affect the pragmatic and narrative dimensions of the SL utterance, as well as the influence of those decisions on the target audience are analyzed. The analysis is based on a pragmatic-narrative interdisciplinary approach that adopts Baker's Narrative Theory (2006) and three pragmatic theories and conventions: Austin's Speech Act Theory (1962), Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975) and Leech's Politeness Principle (1983).

Thesis Chapterization

The present study is divided into three chapters.

The introduction discusses the statement of the research problem, the importance of the study, the aim of the study, the research questions and the scope of the study.

Chapter One reviews the most significant studies on simultaneous interpretation as well as the key issues related to this mode of interpreting, including, the techniques of interpreting, the assessment of interpretation, and the role of interpreters in intercultural interaction. The chapter also tackles the relation between simultaneous interpretation and three pragmatic theories and conventions: Austin's Speech Act Theory (1962), Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975) and Leech's Politeness Principle (1983). Baker's Narrative Theory (2006) is also explored in this chapter with reference to the frames that are created by post 9/11 political speeches through the use of emotionally-loaded language.