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Cognitive-linguistic Processes of Simultaneous Interpreting: A Case Study of Three Speeches by Ex-President Hosni Mubarak (Jan-Feb 2011)

An MA Thesis

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Cognitive-linguistic Processes of Simultaneous Interpreting: A Case Study of Three Speeches by Ex-President Hosni Mubarak (Jan-Feb 2011)

Abstract

Simultaneous interpreting is a process that requires the integration of several mental and linguistic processes at the same time. Not only does this require the interpreter to exert immense cognitive effort, but it also poses a multitude of problems for the interpreter that are not commonly faced by ordinary listeners and speakers. Professional interpreters, however, develop certain strategies and methods to overcome these problems, although this does not pass without some loss. This study aims to explore, both qualitatively and quantitatively the process of interpreting, the difficulties that interpreters face, and the tactics they use to overcome these difficulties, and how this reflects on crisis communication strategies. This is achieved through analysing speakers' verbalized thoughts and the interpreters' rendering of these thoughts. The approach adopted relies on linguistics, interpreting studies, cognitive psychology, as well as discursive psychology. It is based primarily on Daniel Gile's Effort Model of Simultaneous Interpreting (2009), his tightrope hypothesis (which claims that interpreters work almost always close to saturation), and his review of the most common online difficulties and tactics. The analysis covers the informative and communicative value of the source speeches and their interpretation, through analysing particular syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic aspects and how they are delivered. It also explores the communicative behaviour of both speaker and interpreter. On a parallel level, believing in the validity of the argument which states that spoken discourse, and political discourse in particular, has the ability to manipulate events and shape history, and believing, therefore, that its interpreting output is equally important, this study attempts to explore the strategies used by ex-president Hosni Mubarak during the eighteen days of the revolution (Jan-Feb 2011) to contain the crisis, and how they were handled in interpreting. Qualitatively, the study finds Gile's hypothesis about the intrinsic difficulty of interpreting true. It also finds his model and list of problems and tactics very helpful in the analysis but not sufficient, hence the analysis reaches out to other models as well. Quantitatively, the study concludes that the effect of the errors and deviations of the interpretation on meaning, fluency, and crisis communication is statistically limited.

Keywords: simultaneous interpreting, cognitive psychology, discursive psychology, Effort Model, tightrope hypothesis, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, Hosny Mubarak's speeches of the revolution

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List of Abbreviations

A	Available Processing Capacity
C	Coordination Effort
CA	Available Processing Capacity for Coordination
CC	Crisis Communication
CR	Required Processing Capacity for Coordination
DP	Discursive Psychology
EVS	Ear-Voice Span
H	Hearer
ISA	Indirect Speech Act
L	Listening and Analysis Effort
LA	Available Processing Capacity for Listening and Analysis
LR	Required Processing Capacity for Listening and Analysis
M	Memory Effort
MA	Available Processing Capacity for Memory
MR	Required Processing Capacity for Memory
P	Speech Production Effort
PA	Available Processing Capacity for Speech Production
PR	Required Processing Capacity for Speech Production
R	Processing Capacity Requirement
S	Speaker

SI	Simultaneous Interpreting
SL	Source Language
ST	Source Text
TA	Total Available Processing Capacity
TL	Target Language
TR	Total Processing Capacity Requirement
TT	Target Text
Wpm	Word per minute

List of SI Terms and Definitions

Automatic operations: Operations that do not require attention (usually because they have been repeated in the same way), hence consume little or no mental processing capacity (Gile, 2009, p. 159).

Closure addition: when the interpreter inserts an addition after a misinterpretation or an omission to render his/her sentence meaningful (Barik, 1975, p. 82).

Compounding omission: omission in SI in which the interpreter omits some elements and links the rest so that the overall idea remains intact (Barik, 1975, p. 81).

Comprehension tactics: tactics on Daniel Gile's list of coping tactics that aim at enhancing the interpreter's understanding of the ST (Gile, 2009, pp. 201-203).

Coordination Effort (C): the effort exerted in the process of SI to coordinate and manage the other three efforts (L, M, and P) (Shuttleworth & Cowie, 1997, pp. 48, 49).

Coping tactics: spontaneous actions and choices that interpreters resort to online while interpreting to face the challenges of interpreting. These can be oriented towards enhancing comprehension of the ST, preventing anticipated difficulties, or improving the reformulation (Gile, 2009, pp. 200, 201).

Ear-Voice Span (EVS): "the time lag between the moment a speech segment is heard and its reformulation in the target language" (Gile, 2009, p. 204).

Equivalent substitution: ST item "is translated functionally" (Schjoldager, 2002, p. 308). The interpreter replaces a ST expression with one that is more understandable to TT audience.

Failure sequence: when the interpreter exerts too much processing capacity rendering one particular (problematic) item, so his/her rendition of subsequent items is affected although these subsequent items are not themselves problematic (Gile, 1997, p. 166).

Form-based interpretation: one of Gile's reformulation tactics in SI. The interpreter keeps a short EVS with the speaker and produces the TT following the same form of the ST without waiting to understand the whole unit of thought.

Generalizing substitution: ST item "is translated functionally, but conveys less information than relevant source-text item" (Schjoldager, 2002, p. 308).

High density of source speech: when an interpreter has to process more information per unit of time, because the speaker is speaking too fast or there is too much information in small units of the text (Gile, 2009, pp. 192, 193). This presents a problem trigger for the interpreter.

Instant naturalization: one of Gile's reformulation tactics in SI which means naturalizing the source term into the target language by "adapting it to the morphological and/or phonological rules of the target language" (e.g. rendering "*télédétection* (remote sensing)" into "teledetection" (Gile, 2009, p. 207).

Language-specificity related problems: features of the SL or TL that make it/them either easier or more challenging for the interpreter (Gile, 2009, p. 194).

Law of least effort: One of Daniel Gile's SI laws in which the interpreter gives precedence to saving on his/her processing capacity and mental effort to avoid saturation, and selects the suitable coping tactics accordingly (Gile, 2009, pp. 212-213).

Law of self-protection: One of Daniel Gile's SI laws in which the interpreter gives precedence to leaving a satisfactory impression on the audience, and selects the suitable coping tactics accordingly (Gile, 2009, pp. 212-213).

Listening and Analysis Effort (L): the effort exerted in the process of SI starting from the recognition of sounds, through the recognition of words, until a decision is made about the whole meaning (Gile, 2009, pp. 160, 161).

Low anticipability of the ST: another problem trigger for interpreters. It means that the speaker's language, style, rationale, intonation, etc. do not help the interpreter anticipate following segments (Gile, 2009, 193).

Low-risk omissions: omissions of little effect that interpreters commit deliberately, usually unconsciously, to allow more time and processing capacity for more important elements of the text (Pym, 2008, p. 94).

Maximizing communication impact: One of Daniel Gile's SI laws in which the interpreter gives precedence to fluency, continuity, and maintaining the effect of the ST over accuracy, and selects the suitable coping tactics accordingly (Gile, 2009, pp. 212-213).

Maximizing information recovery: One of Daniel Gile's SI laws in which the interpreter gives precedence to rendering as much information as possible in the ST, and selects the suitable coping tactics accordingly (Gile, 2009, pp. 211-212).

Mental modelling: the interpreter reaching outside the ST to background knowledge stored in the long-term memory to better understand the text and fill missing parts (Zwaan & Radvansky, as cited in Padilla & Bajo, 2015, p. 72).

Minimizing interference in information recovery: One of Daniel Gile's SI laws in which the interpreter gives precedence to proper distribution of