

Analyzing Common Problems in Chinese-English Consecutive Interpreting and Countermeasures

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Abstract: Consecutive interpretation is one of the most important and commonest interpretation areas. Interpreters are often required to have excellent language skills, memory, and the ability to convey the exact meaning of the speaker. However, most interpreters, especially inexperienced ones, inevitably make mistakes in consecutive interpretation which will make communication lack efficiency and professionalism. This article reviews some common problems, their causes and coping strategies in the consecutive interpretation: 1) Listening and analysis problems. Its causes include lack of language skills and poor timing in note-taking. Strategies for dealing with this problem include allocating energy and content prediction; 2) Difficulty decoding notes. It can be caused by the formatting of notes and abbreviations. Strategies such as improving overall comprehension and refining the note-taking system can help; 3) Information loss or redundancy. Its causes include short-term memory problems, cultural differences and so on. Strategies for dealing with this problem include doing English to Chinese conversions and so on; 4) Mishandling of logic. It is caused by note-taking and listening errors and over-stimulation. Strategies like analysing the logic of the source text can help. By analysing these problems, interpreters can identify their specific problems and consciously reduce the number of mistakes. Improving the interpreting skills based on strategies can help them convey the speaker's meaning more accurately when doing consecutive interpretations.

Keywords: consecutive interpretation, common problems, causes, strategies

1. Introduction

In the modern era of globalization, countries are becoming more and more interconnected. At an international level, countries need to cooperate in the fields of politics and economics. At a corporate level, multinational companies need to take orders from abroad or cooperate with companies in other countries to grow. These phenomena reflect that there is an urgent need for oral interpretation all over the world. To achieve these goals, cross-linguistic communication is indispensable. The importance of consecutive interpreting is thus demonstrated. However, the top interpreters are, after all, a minority. Due to market demand, new interpreters are constantly being created, and they will inevitably make mistakes in the process of interpreting because of inexperience. Ribas stated that training interpreters is necessary to provide them with strategies that will help future qualified interpreters to solve the problems they encounter [1]. Also, according to Ayupova, consecutive

interpreting is one of the most widely used types of interpretation, but there are still problems in the field that prove the timeliness of studying its problems and strategies for dealing with them [2]. Since consecutive interpretation is so essential, it is of great necessity for interpreters to reduce errors in the process to ensure timely and effective communication between the two parties. This article reviews in detail four common problems: listening and analysis problems, difficulty decoding notes, information loss or redundancy and mishandling of logic. Apart from demonstrating the problems, the article also analysed their causes and concludes with strategies to address them separately.

2. Common Problems, Causes and Coping Strategies

The author will divide the problem into two categories: perception problems and reproduction problems.

2.1.1. Listening and Analysis Problem

Problems concerning listening and analysis are perception problems and are very common among beginners. This issue encompasses both listening and recognition. That is the interpreters need to actively understand and analyse the information based on the speech they heard. According to Gile's effort model of consecutive interpreting, he divided the first phase into four parts: listening and analysis (L) of the source text, note-taking (N), short-term memory (S) and coordination (C) [3]. It is evident that listening and analysis act as the first step of consecutive interpretation. If something goes wrong with the first step, subsequent problems such as missing information and mishandling of logic can occur in the later interpretation.

2.1.2. Main Causes of Listening and Analysis Problem

The first reason is the lack of linguistic competence of the interpreter, which affects listening and understanding. This major problem can be divided into three sub-areas: difficulties in understanding the meaning of words, inefficiency in distinguishing complex sentences and problems with accents. The listening is done almost as soon as the speaker finishes speaking, which means that there is very little time for the interpreter to analyse. It is the major cause of this problem, especially for the inexperienced. The second reason is the inappropriate timing of notes. Taking notes is an indispensable step in consecutive interpretation. Some interpreters do not have a well-developed note-taking system. Their speed of note-taking is not as fast as the speaker's speech. This makes note-taking a stumbling block rather than an aid to interpretation. The last reason might be insufficient knowledge of the conference topic.

2.1.3. Strategies to Deal with Listening and Analysis Problem

Interpreters must clearly understand that listening and analysis are different from only listening. Listening focuses on figures like phonetics and grammar and is free from external noise. Analysis, on the other hand, requires the interpreters to extract key information from the sound symbols heard and reorganise and produce the information outside the source language.

Interpreters can improve listening problems both before and during interpretation. First and foremost, expand the vocabulary and improve the knowledge base. Take listening practice regularly. Follow the speaker's thoughts during the training and analyse the main points and logic chain after listening. The solution for the listening problem lies in practicing certain tasks such as phonetic or semantic shadowing, or talking about what the speaker is saying instead of translating [4]. Interpreters can practice listening to their native language first and then switch to English when reaching a certain level of proficiency.

What is more important is to allocate energy wisely during the interpretation. Here it refers to whether and how much note-taking is done. Wang stated that the primary and secondary information is specific to the importance of the information in the source language text [5]. The content of the interpreter's notes should be filtered for important information. Also, sometimes it is possible to predict what the speaker is going to say in relation to the speaker's position and the content of the speech. For instance, if the speaker is a Ministry of Health official, then his speech may refer to the health or disease infection situation in an area and give instructions to subordinate departments on prevention and control. This method helps the interpreters to guess the general meaning of the speaker's speech by predicting if there is information that they cannot understand when listening.

2.2.1. Difficulty Decoding Notes

Problems about having difficulty decoding notes are perception problems as well. To most consecutive interpreters, taking notes is of great necessity. However, some inexperienced interpreters find it overwhelming to take notes while listening to speakers. When they are required to start interpreting after the speaker finishes their speech, they find it hard to understand what they have written. Here are a few specific aspects that reflect the interpreter's difficulties in decoding notes. The first aspect is the omission of key information or the important details of notes does not stand out. This can cause the interpreter to miss the key information or inability to organize language quickly when interpreting. The second aspect is numbers decoding error. Numbers in Chinese are in units of four, while numbers in English are in units of three. For many interpreters, it is not easy to quickly record and convert between these two different ways. What's more, the lack of a logical relationship between the content is the second aspect. The last aspect is difficulty identifying the content of the notes sometimes due to the scribbled handwriting or taking notes without typesetting.

2.2.2. Main Causes of Difficulty Decoding Notes

Inappropriate timing of note-taking might be the main cause. Time spent taking notes is fundamental to making effective notes in a limited time. Beginners often start taking notes as soon as they hear the sound of the speaker. They often write in a struggle to keep up with the rapid sound of the speaker. However, the notes end up being unproductive. On the contrary, some inexperienced people have not yet put pen to paper even after hearing the whole sentence and end up recalling it for a long time [6]. What's more, if the interpreter's notes are not laid out properly, such notes tend to confine the interpreter's mind to a particular sentence rather than to the overall framework of the content and take longer to obtain information and organise the language output [7]. Another cause is the inappropriate use of logical markers, abbreviations and symbols. Due to inexpert note-taking, beginners sometimes use improvised symbols or abbreviations in consecutive interpretations. This leads to forgetting the meaning of the symbols when interpreting.

2.2.3. Strategies to Deal With Difficulty Decoding Notes

The author must emphasise that note-taking is only an aid to memory. Correct note-taking will help the interpreter in the conference venue; improper note-taking will be a stumbling block to interpretation. Several strategies can help interpreters to improve note decode operation.

First of all, expand the knowledge base to improve note-taking speed. In regular studies, interpreters can expand their knowledge in different areas. In addition to specialised vocabulary, this includes familiarising oneself with collocations between words or slang. What's more, improves overall comprehension. To fully understand the content of a speech, one needs to activate cognitive skills and process the meaning of the text in conjunction with it and refer to contextual information that may not be explicitly stated in the text. This skill is essential in interpreting. Interpreters can do

listening and recognition exercises daily. Try to firstly record the delicate details, like years, numbers and sequence. Then trigger associated information relevant to the text and write down the main idea [6].

Furthermore, layout notes vertically, recording only key information that is useful for prompting. Rozan suggested seven principles for note-taking technique in consecutive interpretation: Noting the idea and not the word, the rules of abbreviation, links, negation, adding emphasis, verticality and shift [8]. In these principles, shift and verticality are the fundamental ones underlying this note-taking system. Verticality means taking notes from top to bottom rather than from left to right. This makes the interpreters easier to understand notes.

Finally, use more abbreviations and symbols. Interpreters can keep a notebook to record and learn other people's symbols in daily training. Also, they can develop new symbols by themselves and become proficient in using them. Decoding will become easier by writing these symbols that interpreters are familiar with. Setton and Dawrant once claimed that the pleasure of learning, inventing and using symbols and pictures to help capture and record the speaker's message should be irresistible to most interpreters [9].

2.3.1. Information Loss and Redundancy

Information loss and redundancy are reproduction problems and they often occur during the interpretation process. Information loss is the phenomenon of loss of information points in the source language due to unavoidable interference in the transmission of linguistic information. Omissions and misinterpretations in interpreting are two forms of information loss [10]. Redundancy is an important fundamental concept in information theory. Founded by C.E. Shannon in 1948, redundancy is the idea that information is inevitably interfered with by noise in the process of transmission through a channel. In order to ensure that the information transmitted through the channel is as accurate as possible, the sender needs to repeat or add up the information when encoding, so that the receiver receives more information than is needed to help decode the real information and thus complete the transmission of information successfully. This extra information is redundant [11]. By nature, redundancy can be divided into syntactic and semantic redundancy. The redundancy of synonyms and the redundancy of pronouns are all manifestations of semantic redundancy. According to the effect of expression, redundancy can be divided into positive and negative redundancy. Negative redundancy includes lexical item deficiencies and meaning deficiencies.

2.3.2. Main Causes of Information Loss and Redundancy

Since information loss and redundancy occur only in the reproduction phase of consecutive interpretation. Therefore, the listening and analysis problem and the note-taking problem are both causes of information loss or redundancy for interpreters in the process. Other causes include short-term memory problems, cultural differences between Chinese and English and poor language habits of interpreters.

Short-term memory is the core of information processing and plays a leading role in memory in interpreting [12]. If the memory of the information is skewed, information may be missed or some information may be added to restore the semantics of the original sentence when interpreting. In addition to the issue of short-term memory, cultural differences are also of concern. Chinese famous translator Xu Chongxin points out in his article "Cultural Exchange and Translation" that what is possessed by source text may not be possessed by target text. Those things in the source language that have a strong cultural background, that can inspire readers to resonate with them, may not produce a strong response for the target language audience. This is because what is familiar in the source language and culture does not find a cultural counterpart in the target language [13]. The

process of translating Chinese culture into English in consecutive interpretations may inevitably change some imagery and expressions. This process may result in the interpreter leaving out or adding information. The last and most personal cause is the poor language habits of interpreters. This is something that interpreters develop subconsciously over the long period they spend learning a second language.

2.3.3.Strategies to Deal With Information Loss and Redundancy

Interpretation emphasises accuracy in the delivery of information, so interpreters need to minimise such problems. Here are some strategies. Firstly, improve the ability to convert between English and Chinese. This process is the stage of detachment from the source language. It looks like a change of language but is a change of two thinking patterns. Interpreters can improve this ability through bilingual rewriting exercises and time-limited retelling. Bilingual rewriting exercises means to rewrite Chinese into English or English into Chinese by adjusting word order or other personal approaches. As for time-limited retelling, since interpreters will face the pressure of time when doing consecutive interpretations. Therefore, when doing daily practices, interpreters should consider time limitations to reduce the probability of making mistakes. Interpreters mobilise their cognitive resources in the retelling process, actively sifting through the information that needs to be retained or discarded to accurately grasp the message to be conveyed [14]. These two methods are effective in reducing missing information and redundancy problems.

Secondly, improves short-term memory. Sometimes information is forgotten or added by the interpreters unconsciously. Based on Huang's experiment that exercises such as memory and retelling the original text exercise the students' ability to grasp the macro meaning of the text and the logical relationship within the text, and achieve good experimental results [15]. This shows that training short-term memory can be fruitful. The third one is improving language habits. Bad language habits such as intoning or stuttering when interpreting can lead to interpreters missing or unconsciously over-speaking information. Therefore, recording the practice sessions, listening to them to identify problems and improving them in the next exercise or practice presentation to improve public speaking skills are of great help. Finally, try to cope with the cultural differences. For example, when encountering a Chinese colloquialism, interpreters can use paraphrasing and amplification to explain its meaning in English.

2.4.1.Mishandling of Logic

Mishandling of logic is also a reproduction problem. In English-Chinese consecutive interpreting, it is essential to deal with the logic of the source language appropriately if the meaning of the source language needs to be conveyed accurately. According to Li, consecutive interpreting is not a single process of listening and producing but involves several complex interconnected links. This includes the transformation of the source language into a translation that conforms to the idiomatic expressions of the target language [14]. However, due to the differences between Chinese and English modes of thinking (e.g. English is hypotaxis while Chinese is parataxis) and some other factors, interpreters inevitably make mistakes in their translations.

2.4.2.Main Causes of Mishandling of Logic

The logic is analysed and translated throughout the interpretation process, so according to Gile's proposed effort model, mistakes at any stage can lead to mishandling of the logic. The article selects only three important causes, namely the listening and analysis stage, the note-taking stage and the reproduction stage. First of all, the success of an interpretation depends to a large extent on the listening and analysis stage. Failure to detect logical information in time and misinterpretation of

logical information at this stage can lead to improper logical processing. When it comes to the note-taking stage, the absence of key logical symbols and the confusion of logical symbols are the main causes of this problem. Finally, the lack of self-monitoring and the weakness of the interpreter's logical expression in the reproduction process can lead to this problem. A lack of self-monitoring means that one does not consciously pay attention to the sentences one puts out and detects errors in them.

2.4.3.Strategies to Deal With Mishandling of Logic

Dealing with the logic chain is a significant part of the consecutive interpretation. Interpreters can improve this ability through the following strategies.

First and foremost, enhance the logical analysis of the source language by noticing logical words in the source language and analysing the implicit logic therein. The interpreter must not only pay close attention to the intuitive logical words but also discover the implicit logic of the source language in context.

Moreover, regular note blocking and structure. Huang points out that to develop a good sense of logic. It is necessary to master the skill of note-taking of logical words, which is a necessary way to ensure that the interpreter understands the relationship of the passage correctly [15]. Interpreters can do this by making detailed distinctions and memorising logical symbols, using dividing lines between chunks of language and vertical stepped layout and separating listing of logic information in the left-hand area of the note.

The last point is to improve the accuracy of the output. Enhance self-listening and logical expression skills through recording or training public presentations. As Huh points out in her article: even if some strategies produce successful interpreting output, when interpreting a foreign language, interpreters still need to use significant cognitive effort in the process, rather than relying on automatic skills [16]. Therefore, training to grasp the logic of the source text and improving cognitive skills is the key to solving this problem.

3. Conclusions

From the review of the current literature, this article reviews several common errors in consecutive interpreting, their causes and strategies for dealing with them. 1) The listening and analysis problem is caused by a lack of linguistic competence, inappropriate timing notes and insufficient knowledge of the conference topic. Strategies like allocating energy wisely during the interpretation and predicting what the speaker will say can improve the listening and analysis ability. 2) Difficulty decoding notes is result from inappropriate timing of note-taking, poorly laid out notes and inappropriate use of logical markers, abbreviations and symbols. To cope with this problem, expanding the knowledge base, improving overall comprehension of the text and refining note taking system can help. 3) Information loss and redundancy is triggered by short-term memory problems, cultural differences and poor language habits. Problems can be improved by doing English to Chinese conversions and short-term memory improvement exercises. 4) Mishandling of logic is caused by weak listening, note-taking and presentation skills and over-stimulation. This can be improved by training in analysing the logic of the source text, standardising the notation and structure of notes and improving the accuracy of output. Finally, aiming to help interpreters reduce the probability of making mistakes in future interpreting and to assist interpreters in practice better in daily training. Although the article summarises four common errors and their coping strategies, it is limited and does not cover all types of errors. Still this article is expected to be useful for future generations of relevant scholars in sorting out this aspect.

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