Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Literature, Language, and Culture Development
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/62/2025.21113

Different Strategies and Techniques Between Professional and Non-Professional Interpreters for Coping with Noises in Consecutive Interpreting

Shuai Zhang[1,a,*]

[1]*Dalian University of Foreign Languages, No.6,West Section, Lvshun South Road, Lvshunkou District, Dalian, Liaoning, 116044, China*
a. veraspace368@163.com
**corresponding author*

Abstract: Interpreting, including simultaneous and consecutive interpreting, is one of the most significant means of intercultural communication. Different factors can affect the content of output of consecutive interpreting, including the speaker's accent, the delivery rate of the source speech, tiredness, note-taking, environmental noise and personal factors. Among these factors, the factor of noise will be the focus of this research. In this research, the author conducts experiments for professional and non-professional translators by means of questionnaires and case studies, aiming to summarize and analyze the different translation strategies and techniques preferred and adopted by various groups of translators when faced with noise during consecutive interpreting, as well as exploring the reasons why these differences occur. The preliminary conclusion is that professional translators have a richer and more systematized knowledge base of translation, while the non-professional translators have a less completed one. More details and analysis will be discussed in the text.

Keywords: consecutive interpreting, noise, professional interpreter, non-professional interpreter

1. Introduction

Translation is a change of form which consists of transferring the meaning of the source language into the receptor language [1]. The modes of interpreting can be mainly categorised into two main types: consecutive interpreting (CI) and simultaneous interpreting (SI) [2]. Consecutive interpreting (CI) involves listening to what someone has to say and then, when they have finished, reproducing the same message in another language [3].

Many scholars have done research into factors that may affect the quality of consecutive interpreting. These factors include the speaker's accent [4][5][6][7]; the delivery rate of the source speech[8][9][10][11][12], tiredness[13][14][15][16], note-taking [17][18][19][20], environmental noise [21][22][23] and personal factors[24][25][26]. Noises discussed in this research do not only refer to physical noise but also include physiological noise, psychological noise and semantic noise [27].

By analysing the results from the experiment, this research aims to find out the differences in translation strategies and techniques used by professional interpreters and trainees while doing CI.

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/62/2025.21113

The hypothesis of the experiment was that professional interpreters have a more complete translation theory system and set of techniques. The results of this experiment will provide a more effective method for translators and trainees in both simultaneous and consecutive interpreting.

This experiment provides three key contributions. Firstly, for scholars and researchers, it can re-validate the theory of Rothwell, making it more authoritative and providing a greater insight into the theoretical framework. Secondly, this study will provide professional translators and teachers in the translation field more inspiration in distinguishing different types of noises. Thirdly, for students and trainees who are receiving training at universities, this paper will enable them to better understand the difference between professional and non-professional translators and give them guidance in their future learning.

2. Methodology

2.1. Subject

Three professional and six trainee interpreters were invited to participate in the experiment. Professional interpreters have busy schedules and do not want to be recorded, so only three were invited in the study; these formed Group 1. To make the ratio between the two groups appropriate, only six trainee interpreters were chosen and these were marked as Group 2.

Participants in this experiment were assigned a number. All participants had Mandarin Chinese as their native language and English as their strongest foreign language. The average age of Group 1 was 45 years of age and 25 years of age in Group 2.

2.2. Material

Considering the types of noises that may appear in the text, careful attention was given to the choice of experimental materials. The English seminar used in the experiment was chosen from a series of online classes held by Johns Hopkins University on 1 October 2020 in Baltimore, US.

According to Rothwell's classification, noises can be categorised as follows:

1. Physical noise, or external environmental distractions, such as startling sounds, poorly heated rooms or the unfortunate periodic reappearance of bell-bottom pants and paisley ties, all divert our attention from the message sent by a source.
2. Semantic noise, as reflected in word choices that are confusing, incomprehensible or distracting, also creates interference.
3. Physiological noise, or biological influences, such as sweaty palms, a pounding heart and butterflies in the stomach induced by speech anxiety, or feeling sick or exhausted at work, can produce dramatic interference on both the senders and receivers of messages.
4. Psychological noise, in the form of preconceptions, biases and assumptions, also interferes with effective message transmission and reception [28].

The fourth noise was not involved because the segments selected for examinates were all within a minute in length, so the interference of psychological noise was avoided in this experiment.

In the experiment, all the types of noises except for psychological noise appear in the text. Four fragments with three typical types of noises from the original video recording of the seminar were provided to all participants for their consecutive interpreting.

2.3. Procedure

Firstly, all the subjects were asked to fill out a pre-experiment questionnaire to submit their personal information like age, gender and experience of using English before the experiment.

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Secondly, the participants received four recording fragments and were asked to interpret the audio-recorded English into Mandarin Chinese. Their output in Chinese was audio-recorded and later transcribed. The author was present during the experiment.

Thirdly, they completed a post-experiment questionnaire on the strategies and techniques they prefer to use, the extent of their experience while doing this CI, other types of noises they had met before and what kind of factors they think influence the quality of their interpreting.

3. Part A

Part A includes the case study and the answers to multiple-choice questions 1-10 of the questionnaire.

3.1. Scenario A

Content accuracy is the first and most important thing for a translator during translation. However, there will still be some missing words and mistakes in translation. When comparing the statistics from this experiment, 33% of Group 1 had omissions and misinterpretations; while the percentage of inaccuracy in Group 2 was 60%. Words and phrases in the following sections that are underlined need to be analysed further.

3.1.1. Case 1

Source text: If you've ever had appendicitis, you're aware of that very peculiar pain down on your lower right side. Ultrasound imaging confirms an abnormal dilated structure in the lower right hand quarter, again giving more confirmation to the anticipated diagnosis of appendicitis.

CI of professional translator 1: 如果你得过阑尾炎,那你应该知道右下腹那种非常特殊的疼痛。超声影像显示右下腹部分组织结构异常肿大,再次印证了医生的预期诊断。

CI of trainee 1: blank

This is a case of omission due to semantic complexity and the difficulty of terms. The source text is regarded as semantic noise because it consists of a few technical terms which are difficult for interpreters to deal with. All medical terms were underlined.

Professional translator 1 had a better grasp of specialised medical terms; he translated "appendicitis" as "阑尾炎", "ultrasound imaging" as "超声影像", "dilated" as "肿大" in Chinese, using more common-used Chinese medical terms and making it more apprehensible for Chinese audiences. Even though he did not fully understand "lower right hand quarter" at the beginning because it seemed like a mathematical term, he still got its meaning as "右下腹" and successfully translated it.

Trainee translator 1 barely understood this sentence because of the frequent appearances of medical terms, so he abandoned the translation of the whole sentence; this behaviour greatly influenced his translation.

3.1.2. Case 2

Source text: ... there's not always a physician onboard the ISS, ...

CI of professional translator 1: 国际空间站上并不总是会有专职医疗人员...

CI of trainee 2: 在此次 iOS 任务中并没有自带医疗人员...

This is the case of mistranslation due to physiological habit. The source text is regarded as physiological noise because of the speaker's quick speech. For those texts or speeches without pauses or with redundant information, the speed should be below 100 WPM [29]. The speaker's speed was 165 WPM, which is considered high-speed speaking.

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Even though “ISS” sounds like “IOS” under high-speed speaking, professional translator 1 still grasped the abbreviation of International Space Station and chose the translation technique of sight interpreting, explaining its meaning as “国际空间站” in Chinese.

Trainee translator 2 did not clearly hear or understand the pronunciation of every word in the whole sentence and misheard the word ISS as iOS, therefore delivering an unfaithful and inaccurate interpretation.

3.2. Scenario B

Delivery appropriateness consists of self-correction, fluency, repetition and grammatical errors. The rate of this happening in Group 1 was 0 and 83% in Group 2.

3.2.1. Case 3

Source text: ... there’s not always a physician onboard the ISS, but there is somebody who’s trained medically to be able to respond to emergencies...

CI of professional translator 2: 国际空间站里并不能保证一直有一名医生,但其中会有人接受过医学培训,从而可以应对突发状况。

CI of trainee 5: 在国际空间站执行任务时,我们一直都有医生,但是,我们有时也会有医生在场,用来应对紧急情况。

This shows self-correction due to physiological noise. Due to the accent and slurred words of the speaker, the word “not” was not pronounced clearly. Consequently, both professional translator 2 and trainee 5 said they did not hear the word “not” before the word “always”; however, they made different resolutions for this problem.

Professional translator 2 made a good response to this text, even though he did not hear the word “not” very clearly. He still thought about the meaning of the context rapidly (within 1 second, he said) and made the inference that there should be a “not” before the word “always”, so he added it in his translation.

Trainee translator 5 started translating just as the speaker began to speak this sentence, without full comprehension of the complete sentence, which resulted in a translation error. This made a contradiction in his translation, which needed to be self-corrected.

3.2.2. Case 4

Source text: Um(__)[1], let’s see. I don’t see my slides advancing(__). If you could help me out here(__). There we go. This is a very exciting time in human space flight.

CI of professional translator 1: 好的,接下来我们进行下一步。不好意思,我的幻灯片好像出了点问题,谁能来帮我看看怎么回事吗?好的,已经可以了,谢谢。接下来这就是人类航天史上激动人心的时刻。

CI of trainee 3: 嗯,好的(__)。我看看,我来看一下(__)。我看不到我的 PPT 下一页,的确看不到。谁来帮我一下。(__)哦好了好了,可以了,我们继续进行。这是人类飞行史上令人激动的时刻。

This case shows repetition due to physical noise. There was something wrong with the equipment playing slides, so the speaker repeated his words, making his speaking intermittent.

[1] Blank in the parentheses indicates a pause.

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Professional translator 1 had more control over the interpretation process, so his interpretation was always fluent. He seldom make any pause or hesitation, making sure that his words were meaningful and would sound more comfortable to listeners. He also had a deeper grasp of international habits and paid more attention to the details, for example, the word PPT, which refers to slides, is applied only in China, while the international express of it is "幻灯片".

Trainee translator 3 did not use many translation techniques here. He translated verbatim, even including filler words, just to avoid blank spaces in his interpretation. He also translated the word "slides" as "PPT" in Chinese, but he did not notice that this term is only familiar to people from China and could be hard for some foreigners to understand.

3.2.3. Case 5

Source text: Hopefully, antibiotics and intravenous fluid result in the resolution of symptoms in this case scenario that we're considering, it result in partial resolution of symptoms.

CI of professional translator 3: 有希望的是,抗生素和静脉输液缓解了病例中的部分症状。

CI of trainee 6: 给了我们希望,抗生素和输液起了作用,在这个病例中,抗生素和输液起到了一部分作用。

This case shows grammatical errors due to semantic noise. This sentence actually means "antibiotics and intravenous fluid result in partial resolution of symptoms in this case". Because the speaker repeated the expression twice there is a redundancy in the sentence, which is considered semantic noise.

Professional translator 3 excluded this repetitious redundancy and used the techniques of simplification, making his translation more concise.

Trainee translator 6 made a grammar mistake here, during his translation of the sentence "给了我们希望"; "给了" is the predicate, "希望" is the direct object and "我们" is the indirect object, so this sentence lacked a subject and the translation failed to follow the grammatical structure.

4. Part B

Part B is the analysis of the answers to questions 11 and 13 of the questionnaires.

Question 11 is: What type of other noises have you met during interpreting that are not mentioned above?

Question 13 is: What kind of deficiency do you think the interpreter has in order to deal with noises during this process of interpreting?

4.1. Scenario A: background knowledge (Q11)

A high-level translator has a better understanding of technical knowledge in different fields than a trainee translator. 67% of Group 1 had accumulated professional knowledge in more than ten fields like medicine and literature, while only 17% of Group 2 had such knowledge.

Professional translator 2:

"As a teacher in university, I also teach some foreign students about Chinese traditional poems and articles. I am quite sure that some obscure literary allusion in them belongs to cultural noise, such as "和光同尘" and "绿肥红瘦", "国是" and "国事". Telling the difference between them sometimes is hard, even some professional broadcasters still make mistakes, so certainly they belong to the cultural noises that I have ever met."

Trainee translator 4:

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"Maybe I have met some other noises, but I am not so sure about them, and I cannot tell the difference between them, or I am not even sure whether it belongs to the cultural noise or not, otherwise I cannot make examples."

By comparing their answers, we can extrapolate that Group 1 had accumulated more comprehensive professional knowledge both in interpreting and cross-cultural communication and apparently knew more academic data. Additionally, Group 1 were clearer about the classification of noises which were not even mentioned in this experiment.

4.2. Scenario B: translation strategy and techniques (Q13)

Translation strategy and techniques play a significant role in the act of interpreting. The percentage of participants who had used English for more than 20 years in Group 1 was 100%, whereas in Group 2 this was only 17%. Consequently, Group 1 had multiple translation strategies and techniques.

Professional translator 3:

"Actually I have more translation strategies and techniques than I have used in this experiment, like integration, amplification and so on. Also I need to make an promotion in making myself immerse into the state of flow more quickly, without forgetting to form my words into a logical closure."

Trainee translator 2:

"The most often translation strategies and techniques that I used are waiting and deletion, I think they are enough for me at most of the times. Maybe what I need to improve is to expand my vocabulary and doing more translation exercise."

By comparing their answers, it can be concluded that Group 1 mastered more knowledge in translation and they match these with various texts and scenes, when required. They also knew clearly about their strengths and how to make improvements in their future translation work. On the other hand, Group 2 did not form a systemic and scientific system of translation strategies and techniques. They used methods more randomly, without the guidance of a specific principle. They knew the importance of improving themselves but did not understand detailed steps.

5. Conclusion

This paper is written within the theoretical framework of Rothwell's theory and classification of noises in the process of translation. The experiment in this paper used the methods of qualitative and quantitative analysis.

The conclusion of this experiment is that professional translators have the mastery of more categories of professional knowledge and more translation strategies and techniques. Moreover, they enjoy a more systemic and clearer cognition of the theories which guide their translations. Also, they have a better understanding of how to improve their translation work in the future.

The trainee translators also have a rudimentary understanding of translation theories, however, their comprehension is rather general and vague and they do not have a specific plan for improving their translation work.

This paper provides multiple contributions. Firstly, it is helpful for professional scholars to verify the theory of Rothwell during their research in translation or CI. Secondly, this paper is useful for translators and educators to classify the noises they meet in the translation process; additionally, they could comprehend more translation strategies and techniques. Thirdly, learners and students can become clearer about the distinction between professional and non-professional translators, and they could learn to translate under the guidance of professional translation theories.

However, there are some limitations in this experiment and article. The cohort of participants was small and the results of this experiment would be more scientific and universal if the sample size were

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7064/62/2025.21113

larger. Additionally, the answers to the questionnaire would be more useful if the professional level of the subjects was higher.

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