# STRATEGIES IN SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETING: A REVIEW

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## ABSTRACT

Simultaneous interpreting is an interpreting mode which occurs simultaneously between the interpreter and the speaker. This paper discusses simultaneous interpreting and the strategies used in simultaneous interpreting. Simultaneous interpreting gives more challenges for the interpreter since the interpreter has to translate orally what has been said within the time allowed by the speed of the speaker. Thus, it is more complicated and needs more attention to the output and active language skills.

KEYWORDS: Interpreting Strategies, Simultaneous Interpreting.

## INTRODUCTION

Simultaneous Interpreting (SI) is arguably the most complex interpreting process. Initially proposed to used prior to World War II, simultaneous interpreting was however not in favor by the conference delegates due to the inability to check for errors or mistakes during the interpreting (Herbert, 1978, as cited in Al-Zahran, 2007). It was until the Nuremberg Trial in 1940s that SI was recognized and then widely used to replace consecutive interpreting (Bowen & Bowen, 1984, as cited in Al-Zahran, 2007). One significant reason for its popularity was none other than SI was effective to solve an issue of interpreting more than two languages for a larger mass which was time saving (Ramler, 1988 as cited in Al-Zahran, 2007). Its complexity, simultaneity, and speed traits, however, make those who aspire to be a simultaneous conference interpreter mostly unable to fulfill (Moser-Mercer, 2000).

Bilingual people have basic skills necessary to perform a simultaneous task (Chang & Schallert, 2007; Wade, 2015). However, when dealing with formal and under pressure situations where an interpreter is demanded to re-express ideas continuously that have been listened to from the speaker of a language to the listeners in another

language of another culture, all bilinguals require more training, skills, and strategies to succeed in simultaneous interpreting tasks (Chang & Schallert, 2007; Lee, 2006; Shofner, n.d.; Wade, 2015; Wallace, 2019). SI is often referred to as "listening and speaking concurrently" or "holding the spoken message while simultaneously formulating and articulating the translated message" (Mizuno, 2005, p. 740). In addition, in SI, rendering speeches from the source language to the target another in real time is innately arduous and demanding work (Vogler, Stewart, & Neubig, 2019).

### THE CONCEPT OF SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETING (SI)

Generally, SI can be defined as "the act of converting the meaning of naturally occurring sentences in one language into sentences of another language" (Isham & Lane, 1993, p. 242). As the name suggests, an interpreter who interprets simultaneously means that at the same time of the speaker is speaking, the interpreter also listens and speaks to the listeners of another language through the use of technology (i.e. microphone, headphone). Thus, the speaker will not be interrupted during speaking (Chen & Dong, 2010; Christoffels & De Groot, 2004). Unlike in consecutive interpreting where the interpreter will take time to wait for the speaker to finish his/her speaking and then to interpret later, SI offers an alternative and ultimately provides a number of benefits, most notably in regard with "*efficiency*" in the events which have many languages, "*saving time and cost*" so that the events can proceed smooth and well without spending too much on resources, and "*convenience for the participants*" to be able to listen for presentation without having a break for interpreting (i.e. consecutive interpreting) (Chen & Dong, 2010, p. 714).

Obviously, having such benefits implies that SI has a complex process underlying its undisputable performance. At the same moment of time, a simultaneous interpreter needs to listen to what the speaker is saying (Daro & Fabbro, 1994) and to "comprehend and store input segments in the source language, transform an earlier segment from source to target language, produce an even earlier segment in the target language, and cope with time pressure since SI is externally pace" (Christoffels & De Groot, 2004, p. 227). Again, it is "the speaker, not the interpreter, determines the speaking rate" (Christoffels & De Groot, 2004, p. 227). Hence, the ability to interpret in a continuous manner is inevitably a high demanding task that even an experienced interpreter may encounter problems in catching up with the speaker's pace and eventually make mistakes (Gile, 1997, as cited in Christoffels & De Groot, 2004, p. 227). It is then not very surprising that with pressure to produce similar ideas as expressed by the speaker in a limited time and resources during the interpreting, a simultaneous interpreter needs to "act strategically" and "apply simpler solutions whenever possible" (Bacigalupe, 2010, p. 41).

Bartłomiejczyk (2006) provides a well-defined concept which refers interpreting strategies to "methods that are potentially conducive to solving particular problems encountered by interpreters or generally facilitating the interpreter's task and preventing potential problems" (p. 152). Bartłomiejczyk (2006) has made good points in her definition that strategies should be "potential" to cope with issues faced by simultaneous interpreters, in which she also adds that they should be "problem-oriented and overall strategies" (p. 152)

### STRATEGIES IN SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETING

A comprehensive list of strategies has been proposed by Gile (1995) called "coping tactics", which he argues as a necessary skill for interpreter's practical work (p. 191). The coping tactics are categorized into three: comprehension tactics, preventive tactics and reformulation tactics. First, *comprehension tactics* are "used when comprehension problems arise or are perceived as threatening to arise" (Gile, 1995, p. 201). There are four basic comprehension tactics including:

a) delaying response (for a few seconds) to have some time for thinking while also receiving more source language input,

b) reconstructing the segment with the help of the context, that is by using the interpreter' knowledge of the language, the subject and the situation, s/he can try to reconstruct what s/he may not heard properly,

c) using the booth mate's help (there are at least two interpreters in a booth, therefore, one active interpreter may give hints for his/her teammate for a solution of a problematic speech segment), and

d) consulting documents in the booth in which cases where there is no booth mate, the interpreter may look at the documents s/he already has beforehand quickly (Gile, 1995, pp. 201-203).

Second, *preventive tactics* are "used when time or processing capacity pressure is such that the interpreter believes a problem may arise or is about to occur" (Gile, 1995, p. 203). These preventive tactics include the following:

a) taking notes (i.e. figures or names that may be forgotten or unable to reformulate right away),

b) changing the Ear–Voice Span (time lag between comprehension and reformulation), that is the interpreter can increase comprehension by lagging further behind, however, it may overload short-term memory,

c) segmentation, where the interpreter tries to reformulate speech segments earlier even though he has not fully grasped what the speaker is saying, such as saying "*Equation (1) as shown above is complex*" instead of a more proper

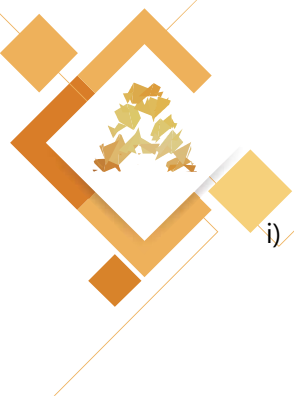form as in *"Because of the complex character of equation (2) as shown above"*, and

d)  changing the order of elements in an enumeration, such as by "reformulating the last elements first so as to free memory from the information, and then to move on to other elements" which works effectively with names (Gile, 1995, pp. 203-204).

Third, *reformulation tactics* are "used in reformulation in order to eliminate the potential consequences of production problems or short-term memory problems" (Gile, 1995, p. 204). The first three reformulation tactics are similar to the comprehension tactics mentioned above such as:

a)  delaying response,
b)  using the booth mate's help, and
c)  consulting documents in the booth.

Apart from those three strategies, the interpreter also implements other reformulation tactics, involving:

d)  replacing a segment with a superordinate term or a more general speech segment, for example, expressing *"la streptokinase"* as *"the enzyme"* or *"DEC, IBM, Hewlett Packard et Texas Instruments"* as *"a number of computer vendors."* This tactic may lose information in the target language, but it may be already repeated or known by the listeners, thus it does not make the listeners lose all the information,

e)  explaining (paraphrasing), in cases where the interpreter may not know a proper term in the target language, explaining the term should be sufficient. For example, the data processing term *"tableur"* *(spreadsheet)* is interpreted as *"the program which defines rows and columns and allows calculations to be made"*,

f)  reproducing the sound heard in the source-language speech. Although it is not cognitively intelligent tactic, it is efficient to cover the inability of the interpreter to reformulate the proper target language expression. The listeners will hear the name or term as it is pronounced by the interpreter in the source language and may not realize that the interpreter has a problem,

g)  instant naturalization, which means adapting a term into the morphological or phonological rules of the target language (i.e., *"télédétection"* in French (remote sensing) is rendered as *"teledetection"* in English),

*h)*  transcoding, which means translating the information or speech segments of the source language word for word (i.e., the English term *"maturity date"* in accounting has the equivalent of *"date d'échéance"* in French, instead it is interpreted as *"date de maturité")*,

i) informing delegates of an interpretation problem, which makes the interpreter explicitly mention his mistake such as, by saying *"…the interpreter is sorry, he missed the last number."* However, this may draw the listeners' attention to the interpreter's problem and distract the listeners from the speaker's information, and thus, it should not be used very frequently,

*j)* referring them to another information source. In cases where information is also provided in written handouts, on screen, via slides or overhead transparencies, and the interpreter fails to reformulate the speech, he may say that the listeners should look at "*the figures/names/equation etc. on the screen/in your handout",*

k) omitting the information, it refers to the situations where the interpreter has missed some information without realizing and thus, he may deliberately not reformulate the information. The omission should not lose all necessary information for the listeners as it may reappear or already mentioned beforehand,

l) parallel reformulation, which is quite an extreme tactic. When the interpreter is unable to appropriately listen, understand and reformulate the speech segments in the target language, but feels that it is necessary to continue interpreting, the interpreter may try to invent speech segments compatible to the source language. Because the parallel segments are not faithful to the problematic source language, therefore, this tactic should be used very cautiously and with considerations of ethical codes of interpreting, and

m) switching off the microphone, which is in actuality very rare implemented. This is another extreme tactic where the interpreter thinks that s/he cannot perform the job well and is in a very poor working condition. This tactic may be used only if the interpretation is worse than no interpretation at all (Gile, 1995, pp. 204-2016).

Among the aforementioned coping tactics, Chang and Schallert (2007) have summarized the types of strategies often used in SI by the interpreters, involving "anticipation, maintaining a comfortable ear–voice span, reformulation, chunking, simplification, generalization, summarizing, paraphrasing and omission" (p. 140).

All of the strategies employed also reflect the interpreters' attempts to overcome the challenges of SI tasks; for instance, to deal with pressure of SI, the interpreters may use summarizing strategy, whereas paraphrasing is employed to cope with language issues (Chang & Schallert, 2007).

The interpreters working in SI settings should take steps to ensure the accuracy of their live interpretation and the ways to train themselves. It is preferable that the

interpreters can get a hand on the scripts of the speakers they are going to render as they can prepare themselves in advance and get the overall understanding of the script contexts (Lee, 2006). In addition, the interpreters should not devote longer time to a phrase/sentence by seeking fancier alternatives as real time SI settings do not permit such a luxury; however, the interpreters should get the ideas of the speech of the speakers and find the strategy to understand them as quickly as possible to achieve better outcomes (Lee, 2006). As such, to gain improvement in SI, the interpreters may choose the coping tactics stated by Gile (1995) that suit the challenging circumstances when doing SI tasks.

## CONCLUSIONS

The literature review on the strategies of simultaneous interpreting is very beneficial, particularly to the success of the simultaneous interpreter's work. It is well known that SI requires a very complicated language processing skill. Not only that the simultaneous interpreter needs to listen to every piece of information from the source language, s/he also needs to speak with the same pace as the speaker to re-express the information into the target language to the listeners. The accuracy and fluency of the simultaneous interpreter are very much expected even though there are cases where the simultaneous interpreter may miss the information or lose track due to the speaker's speaking pace. In cases like these, it is necessary for any simultaneous interpreter to have the ability to cope with difficult or problematic situations. Hence, the descriptions of the interpreting strategies outlined in this review are hopefully able to offer a useful insight to the interpreting field. However, this review is far from perfect as it is unable to cover other different strategies that may be further researched and easy to implement in real simultaneous interpreting settings. Nevertheless, Gile's coping tactics and a few others are very comprehensive and they address specific issues that may be perceived as preventions and solutions along with good examples to understand the SI situations.

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