
DIRECTIONALITY AND CONTEXT EFFECTS IN WORD TRANSLATION TASKS PERFORMED BY CONFERENCE INTERPRETERS

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Abstract.

Professional interpreters hired by multinational organisations often work into their L1 from their L2, whereas freelance interpreters work both into and out of their L1. A research was designed to examine if long-term interpreting unidirectional practise (in the L2-L1 direction only) improves the speed of lexical retrieval exhibited by reduced translation latencies, as opposed to bidirectional practise (in the L2-L1 and L1-L2 directions). Oral translations of nouns presented in isolation, high context constraint sentences, and low context constraint sentences were provided by 48 professional conference interpreters. The findings show that the dominating directionality in interpreting practise has minimal influence on the strength of interlingual lexical linkages in the interpreter's mental lexicon, or that other factors (such as language usage, exposure, and immersion) may counterbalance any such influence. The study also discovered an expected context effect, indicating that interpreters employ semantic constraint to predict sentence-ending terms.

Keywords.

conference interpreting; word translation; directionality; bidirectional interpreters; interpreting.

Introduction

Professional conference interpreters are bilinguals or multilinguals who provide specialist language services to help parties who do not speak the same language communicate effectively. Interpreters are classified based on their working language profiles, which include A, B, and C languages. Working languages are classified into active languages (A and B, i.e. those into which interpreters work) and passive languages (C, i.e. those from which interpreters work), according to the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC 2014), the leading and most prestigious professional organisation of conference interpreters. A language is defined as "the interpreter's native language (or another language exactly equivalent to a native language), into which the interpreter works from all of her or his other languages in both simultaneous and sequential modes of

interpretation." "A language other than the interpreter's own language, of which she or he has excellent command and into which she or he works from one or more of her or his other languages," says the dictionary. The C language is defined as a language "of which the interpreter has a thorough comprehension and from which she or he works" (AIIC 2014), a language that the interpreter "completely understands and would most frequently speak to some extent, but not enough to work into that language." Because many interpreters work on national markets where interpreting into B is common practise, such different language use profiles (unidirectionality - interpreting only into A language and bidirectionality - interpreting equally frequently into and from A language) may have some bearing on the structure of the bilingual mental lexicon with prolonged experience.

According to the Revised Hierarchical Model (Kroll and Stewart 1994), the strength of word-to-word and word-to-concept linkages in the bilingual mental lexicon evolves. It is anticipated here that unidirectional interpreters would exhibit a directionality effect, that is, they will interpret words quicker into their A language than into their B language, but bidirectional interpreters will perform symmetrically in both directions.

Furthermore, as a result of their professional expertise, both groups will perform differently in semantically limited and unconstrained circumstances. Before presenting an experimental study, I will review the issue of directionality in conference interpreting practise and research, as well as briefly discuss the Revised Hierarchical Model as a model of bilingual word production well suited to the discussion of lexical access in the context of conference interpreting.

This work is the product of an interdisciplinary investigation at the intersection of interpretation studies and psycholinguistics. As a result, before starting, I need clarify certain terminological differences.

As previously stated, the interpreter's working languages are commonly referred to as A, B, and C.

When applied to the characteristics of interpreters investigated in this study, A language corresponds to the interpreter's L1, B to L2, and C is generally equivalent to L3. Because this study leans on psycholinguistic research in its theoretical section and employs psycholinguistic methods in its experimental section, I have opted to refer to translation direction using terminology congruent with psycholinguistics. So, instead of A-to-B or B-to-A labels, L1-L2 vs L2-L1 labels will be employed. Another difference concerns the nature of the translation work. Generally, in translation and interpreting studies, translating refers to a written activity, whereas

interpreting refers to an oral action. Similarly, translators give written translations of source language utterances, and interpreters provide vocal renderings of the source language speech. To complicate matters further, translation is also used as a synonym for both written translation and spoken translation, i.e. interpreting. This is consistent with the psycholinguistic tradition, which refers to activities requiring the vocal rendering of a stimulus word in the target language as word translation tasks. To eliminate terminological ambiguity, I shall refer to a verbal answer that includes a translation of the stimulus word given visually as a "word translation task."

At significant international organisations such as the United Nations, NATO, the European Commission, and the European Parliament, only L1 interpretation is the norm. Interpreters working for such organisations typically translate from their second and third languages into L1. *Retour* interpreting is the term used to describe interpreting into a second language. Pavlovi includes additional phrases (such as inverse or reverse interpreting) and emphasises the negative implications of names for L1-L2 interpreting or translating. She examines a relatively prescriptivist approach to translation directionality that favours the L2-L1 direction. This is notably evident in the Western tradition, which was primarily moulded by the Paris School (Seleskovitch and Lederer 1989).

According to this viewpoint, L1-L2 interpretation is unacceptable since it results in lesser quality. The fundamental logic is that production appears to be more significant than understanding in interpreting, hence the path involving production in the interpreter's strongest language (i.e. into L1) is preferred. The Eastern tradition, as represented by Denissenko (1989) and Chernov (1992), accepts L1-L2 interpreting by asserting that understanding is essential to its quality. As a result, L1-L2 interpreters have an edge since they interpret from their L1. Interestingly, Gile (2005) shows, using his Effort Model, that one may identify whether interpretation direction is more advantageous based on how one views the difficulty of generating language in comparison to the difficulty of comprehending it.

If production is seen to be more cognitively demanding than comprehension, interpreting into L1 is better since producing output in L1 is simpler than producing output in L2. If comprehension is thought to take more cognitive resources than creation, the opposite would be true. Other aspects, however, come into play (for example, low sound circumstances favouring L2 interpretation because it is easier to grasp one's L1 under challenging settings) (see Gile 2005 for a

review). Another example is language pair specificity. In the case of interpreting between Polish and English, for example, interpreting into Polish, which is a highly inflectional language, may be more prone to inflectional errors due to the need to self-monitor suffixes in production; conversely, interpreting into English, which is more constrained in word order than Polish, may be more prone to syntactic errors as it requires more sentence-level restructuring. After evaluating empirical studies on directionality in interpreting, I shall return to the relevance of understanding and production in interpreting.

Despite of theoretical perspectives on directionality and mainstream practises in major organisations, L1-L2 interpreting appears to be a common practise in nations with restricted spread of languages, such as Central and Eastern European countries (Szabari 2002: 13). This is due to the fact that there are rarely many English native speakers who also speak Croatian, Polish, Finnish, or Danish, and that installing two separate booths and hiring four unidirectional interpreters instead of two bidirectional interpreters for a bilingual event would not be cost effective. Pavlovi conducted a study of Croatian professionals working as both interpreters and translators and discovered that the majority of them interpret from L1 into L2 and that as many as 73% work from L1 into L1. Surprisingly, when it comes to directionality preferences, one-third of respondents prefer working in L1, one-third in L2, and one-third has no preference.

Additional research indicate that translators in Hungary and other Central European nations operate equally into and out of their active language.

Conclusion

My research found that translation latencies are shorter in the L2-L1 direction than in the L1-L2 direction. By giving translation equivalents in their L1, the participants fared better. It is important to remember that the experimental study presented here includes just word translation as an experimental task, which cannot be completely generalizable to the actual interpreting work. Yet, word translation (in context) is a subtask of interpreting. As a result, such findings appear to offer partial and indirect support to the approach to the directionality issue in interpretation advocated by Western researchers (such as Seleskovitch and Lederer 1989) and international organisations (such as the UN and the EU). Due to the L1 advantage in production, this method suggests that interpreting should only be done in the interpreter's native language. The directionality effect (L2-L1 direction advantage) was seen only in the group of bidirectional interpreters, not in the group of unidirectional interpreters, contrary to my predictions. I assumed that

the substantial interpreting experience exclusively shared by unidirectional interpreters would reflect itself in the asymmetry of lexical linkages in their mental lexicon, resulting in shorter L2-L1 translation latencies. I predicted no direction imbalance in translation latencies by bidirectional interpreters who operate equally often into their L1 and L2.

It was discovered that the main directionality in their professional interpreting practise has no or has a little influence in influencing the strength of the lexical linkages compared to other parameters. Language usage, exposure, and immersion are examples of these characteristics. My bidirectional interpreters have an L2-L1 direction advantage since they live and operate in an L1 environment. Unidirectional interpreters, on the other hand, operate in an L2 environment and dwell in an L3 environment. As a result, their L1 advantage may be diminished. In general, the findings support the Revised Hierarchical Model's premise about the dynamic nature of word-to-concept and word-to-word mappings in the bilingual lexicon.

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