

ORIGINAL PAPER

DOI: 10.26794/2308-944X-2023-11-1-46-50
UDC 81'253(045)
JEL Z13

International Communication through the Mind of an Interpreter

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ABSTRACT

Interpretation as a form of intercultural communication plays an important role in modern geopolitical conditions, hence the role of the interpreter as a mediator between languages and mentalities acquires even greater **significance** as high-quality interpretation ensures successful international communication. The authors **focus** on studying simultaneous interpreting as a cognitive process and set the **goal** of analyzing how the incoming message is perceived and processed in the mind of the interpreter and then transformed into a target language message. Applying the **method** of comparative cognitive transformation, the authors arrive at the **conclusion** that, since the interpreter operates on the cognitive level, the process of de-verbalizing the source message is a transformation of the ordinary language into a language of thought, thus rendering the gist of the original can be achieved through identifying the underlying concepts in the source language message and finding correlations in the target language. Before attempting to formulate the target message, the interpreter should first de-verbalize the original and get rid of its linguistic form, that is, cognitively imagine the sense of the message as a certain space of connections. Effective international communication with the target language recipients means that the interpreter needs to account for the pragmatics of the speech act and find a ready-made concise variant expressing a similar idea in the target language.

Keywords: communication; cognitive linguistics; pragmatics; speech production; mind; interpretation; simultaneous interpreting; compression

For citation: Konurbaev M.E., Ganeeva E.R. International communication through the mind of an interpreter. *Review of Business and Economics Studies*. 2023;11(1):46-50. DOI: 10.26794/2308-944X-2023-11-1-46-50

ОРИГИНАЛЬНАЯ СТАТЬЯ

Международная коммуникация сквозь призму мышления переводчика

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АННОТАЦИЯ

Устный перевод как форма межкультурной коммуникации играет важную роль в современных геополитических условиях, таким образом роль переводчика как посредника между разными языками и менталитетами приобретает еще большее **значение**, поскольку качественный перевод обеспечивает успешную международную коммуникацию. Авторы рассматривают синхронный перевод как когнитивный процесс и ставят **задачу** проанализировать, каким образом входящее сообщение воспринимается и обрабатывается в сознании переводчика, а затем преобразуется в сообщение на языке перевода. Применяя **метод** сравнительной когнитивной трансформации, авторы приходят к **выводу**, что, поскольку переводчик оперирует на когнитивном уровне, процесс девербализации исходного сообщения представляет собой трансформацию обычного языка в язык мысли, поэтому передать суть оригинала можно путем выявления концептов, лежащих в основе исходного сообщения, и соотношения их с концептами в языке перевода. Прежде чем формулировать свой вариант перевода, переводчику следует девербализовать поступающее сообщение и абстрагироваться от его языковой формы, т.е. когнитивно представить смысл сообщения как

некое пространство связей. Эффективная международная коммуникация с реципиентами языка перевода означает, что переводчику необходимо учитывать прагматику речевого акта и находить готовый емкий вариант перевода, выражающий аналогичную мысль на целевом языке.

Ключевые слова: коммуникация; когнитивная лингвистика; прагматика; речепорождение; мышление; перевод; синхронный перевод; компрессия

Для цитирования: Конурбаев М.Э., Ганеева Э.Р. Международная коммуникация сквозь призму мышления переводчика. *Review of Business and Economics Studies*. 2023;11(1):46-50. DOI: 10.26794/2308-944X-2023-11-1-46-50

Introduction

Translation and interpretation have long been established as forms of intercultural communication. In modern geopolitical conditions, the role of the interpreter as a mediator between languages and mentalities is of greatest importance, since successful international communication is key to ensuring mutual understanding and achieving results.

In this context, the question arises about the pragmatic orientation of simultaneous interpretation and the participants of the communicative act, whose interests are a significant factor in selecting a target-language variant. The search for a pragmatically appropriate mode of compression is determined by such important factors as the communicative intention of the speaker, the communicative effect of the source and the target message, as well as the recipients of the target message. The question is what kind of information did the interpreter find communicatively relevant?

The object of simultaneous interpretation is the natural flow of speech, which is often spontaneous. Before attempting to formulate the target message, the interpreter should first deverbalize the original and get rid of its linguistic form, that is, cognitively imagine the sense of the message as a certain space of connections. The nature of interpreter's thinking does not involve formulating the entire message into a long linguistic chain with classical syntax. As M. E. Konurbaev notes, the interpreter rather thinks through elements of a gestalt, which are further translated into something else [1, p. 205].

Since simultaneous interpretation involves the task of interpreting the source message quickly and in a concise manner, an interpreter has to allocate the analytical capabilities of the brain to perform several operations simultaneously: process the incoming message, understand, interpret, evaluate pragmatics, select an equivalent expression, and observe the time limit. In order

to allow the analytical center of the brain to fully process the incoming speech with its peculiarities that render it difficult for perception, the interpreter should make the process of selecting appropriate expressions in the target language more automatic with the help of his personal "library" of set expressions used in the given context. We believe that context automatization is possible if the interpreter has sufficient background knowledge, experience and practice in a particular type of discourse.

In reality, a simultaneous interpreter specializes in certain areas of knowledge and develops his own "library" of expressions and constructions, which are tied to specific speech situations. As a result of multiple repetitions in similar contexts, the meaning of these constructions becomes as concise as possible, and the interpreter is able to find a laconic equivalent.

Speech production and analysis in reference to simultaneous interpreting

The results of studies of the brain using modern methods of brain activity imaging demonstrate that different brain areas are responsible for certain links in the processes of perception and speech generation [2, p. 52–53]. Thus, neural networks in the temporal cortex and inferior frontal cortex of the left hemisphere are responsible for syntactic processing, whereas temporal-frontal neural networks take part in semantic processing. "Suprasegmental prosodic information is processed predominantly in the temporal-frontal neural network of the right hemisphere. Posterior areas of the corpus callosum play a major role in integrating syntactic and prosodic information" [2, p. 52–53].

According to research data, understanding of the meaning of words, especially context-dependent ones, and production of coherent speech suffer when there is damage to the deep sections of

the left temporal lobe, responsible for auditory-speech memory and posterior-associative areas, including the Wernicke area, where elements of speech structure are integrated into the semantic grid [3, p. 14–15]. If the Broca area is affected, it would lead to getting stuck on a certain syllable, transposition of letters, repetition of the previous utterance [3, p. 14–15]. Thus, the production of oral speech occurs with the participation of several brain structures: parietal and occipital parts of the brain (transcoding the visual image into its sound equivalent), the left temporal area (preservation of the acoustic structure of the word), the frontal cortex, which controls the entire brain system [3, p. 14–15].

In other words, the Broca's area is connected with the tongue and other organs involved in articulation, since tongue movements are observed during cognitive processes. The Wernicke area is adjacent to the auditory and visual centers, which explains the fact that saying the same thing frequently contributes to memorization, as it leads to the signal becoming as concise as possible. In the process of simultaneous interpreting, automatization through multiple repetition plays a key role. The interpreter's auditory memory already contains a large number of laconic constructions, allowing him to select ready-made equivalents in his target language using compression. We believe that in the process of simultaneous interpreting, the interpreter's brain perceives speech as a whole, not as a collection of separate language units. Due to time constraints, the interpreter has no opportunity to analyze the incoming information and differentiate between linguistic levels, he perceives the meaning at a higher, cognitive level — the language of thought.

The theory of the existence of a special language of thought is described in detail in the works of scientists who deal with the connection between language and thinking. Thus, Jerry Fodor speaks about the “language of thought” [4], Steven Pinker calls this language “mentalese” [5].

In Russian psycholinguistics, the term “universal subject code” was introduced by N. I. Zhinkin, who emphasized that “it transforms cognitive content about reality directly into signs of speech and vice versa. This translation of thought into signs is made in internal speech, without which external speech cannot take place” [6, p. 64–66]. The author understands internal speech as a cer-

tain “language of speech” — a code consisting of objects and schemes — it is non-verbalized, universal, free of redundancy, and, therefore, concise. As the scientist believes, the mechanism of thinking is carried out “in two opposing dynamic links — the subject-imaginative code (inner speech) and the speech-motor code (expressive speech)” [7, p. 26–38].

Analyzing the process of coding in an act of speech, N. I. Zhinkin identified three main stages: 1) the transition from the phoneme grid to the morpheme grid; 2) the transition from the morpheme grid with incomplete words to complete words in the message, including a whole system of code transitions; 3) the speech-movement code as the dominant part of the speech process, marking its beginning and end [8, p. 362–363]. N. I. Zhinkin underlined that before the selection of final words of the message takes place, there had to occur a series of replacements of words by simple signals or visual images.

Another important aspect of the process of speech production is the code of transition from full words to simple signals, which allows for understanding the general sense of the message and independently recoding it into full words, and the words may differ, but be equivalent in meaning. N. I. Zhinkin understood this process as “paraphrasing or equivalent replacement of some words of the text by others”, the accuracy of which can be verified by an adequate reproduction of the subject relations indicated in the text [8, p. 363–366]. In conclusion, the scientist, following in the footsteps of I. P. Pavlov, emphasized the role of speech movements as the initial code key that underlies the entire complex mechanism of speech, as they are “the basis of thought activity” [8, p. 363–366].

Thus, internal speech represents a kind of code or intermediary language. “The origin of thought is carried out in an object-image code: a representation as well as the thing it represents can become the subject of an infinite number of utterances” [7, p. 26–38]. For a simultaneous interpreter, this means an opportunity to formulate a thought more briefly to reduce the lag behind the speaker.

Cognitive pragmatic approach to simultaneous interpreting

The cognitive approach to simultaneous interpreting presupposes that the interpreter “re-

ceives a text in sound or written form, which then, on the basis of knowledge and experience conventionally represented by a set of static and dynamic frame structures, appears as meanings and sense, which find their expression in interpretation". At the same time, understanding the meaning of the segment is usually carried out through an interactive process, in which the bottom-up principle (analysis) represents the perception of the linguistic content of the text and its structural organization, and the top-down principle (anticipation) activates the background knowledge necessary to understand this text [9, p. 22]. In our opinion, this interpretation is suitable for describing the process of written translation, whereas in simultaneous translation, there is no opportunity to analyze the message "from the bottom up". The interpreter is forced to anticipate what idea the speaker wishes to convey based on the key words that form a dynamic cognitive image in the interpreter's mind.

From a pragmatic point of view, the interpreter faces the task of recoding the meaning of the message from some mental language, the language of thought, into a verbal one, while using compression as a time-saving tool. In our opinion, an accurate compression in simultaneous interpreting can only be achieved through cognitive processes: first one has to grasp the dynamic cognitive image of the source message and try to foresee the ways it can unfold in the speech on the basis of algorithms existing in the language, and then to choose the most effective and concise means of conveying this sense, taking into account the communicative situation of the speech act, including the recipients of the target language version.

Therefore, at the first stage, the interpreter needs to identify the gist of the message by running it through a kind of "filter" of concepts existing in the cultures of the languages in question. Then, the interpreter should compare the gist that was embedded in the message and now exists in the condensed form, and the concept to which it refers, with the concepts of the mentality of the native speakers of the target language to see if they coincide. Finally, the interpreter has to express this non-verbalized message in a concise and comprehensible way for a given audience in a given communicative situation.

For example, when faced with an English proverb *Charity begins at home*, which has no analogue

in Russian, the simultaneous interpreter may take the path of conveying the informative component of the message and simply render it more or less literally as *Благотворительность начинается дома* or *Благодетель рождается дома*, or *Семья прежде всего*.

Evidently, the literal interpretation of the proverb, without reference to the extralinguistic context of the situation, does not correspond to the communicative intent of the speaker, who may mention the proverb in passing, which indicates that the phrase is well-known to the audience, so the literal variants of translation will not resonate with their mental concepts. In this case, the interpreter should either find a corresponding expression in the Russian culture or try to refer to the "library" of key concepts, which are stored in the form of aphoristic statements such as the commandments and formulate something similar.

In our opinion, in this situation the following option would be suitable, which appeals to cultural realities and at the same time is a concise variant of expressing a similar idea: *Помоги ближнему*. The same concept of helping one's neighbor, which originates in the Bible, in English may have transformed into the proverb *Charity begins at home*, while in Russian it retains a close connection with the Bible.

Thus, compression in simultaneous interpreting has informational and cultural dimensions. By matching cognitive structures rather than linguistic units, we begin to understand how compression occurs.

Conclusions and discussion

Thus, the interpreter operates on the cognitive level – with the language of thought or mentalese, and the process of deverbalizing the source message is a transformation of the ordinary language into a language of thought. Due to the time limits of simultaneous interpretation, the interpreter should think and react instantaneously, rendering the gist of the original by identifying the underlying concepts and finding correlations in the target language.

The process of understanding the sense of the original message goes beyond purely linguistic realm and involves deep cognitive concepts that would allow the same thought to be conveyed to the speakers of the target language in a way they can relate to.

In order to effectively communicate the message to the target language recipients, the interpreter needs to find a ready-made concise variant expressing a similar idea in the target language, rather than creating it during simultaneous interpretation. In this respect, compression should be analyzed from

the point of view of discourse, because it predetermines the ways and modes of compression. Types of discourse can vary significantly within the framework of international communication and require further research with reference to compression in simultaneous interpretation.

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Conflicts of Interest Statement: The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

The article was submitted on 21.02.2023; revised on 05.03.2023 and accepted for publication on 17.03.2023.

The authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.