

An Empirical Study of Interpreting Quality with Interpretive Theory and Teaching Strategies*

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Abstract—Interpreting has become very important in the modern society. But interpreting teaching has always focused on exercises, not quality. The establishment of MTI in China has not solved this problem. This article attempts to identify effective teaching strategies by conducting an empirical study with Interpretive Theory.

Index Terms—interpreting, interpretive theory, teaching strategies

I. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The Interpretive Theory was first proposed by Seleskovitch and Lederer, professors of ESIT. The core is deverbalization, which holds that interpreting is not just a change from source language to target language. It is a kind of reformulation on the basis of understanding. Therefore, the interpreting process can be divided into three stages: understanding of the source language, deverbalization and re-expression on the basis of understanding. And sense unit has informed the three stages.

Setton has done some research on the interpreting process from the perspective of cognition and pragmatics. He (1999) holds that interpreting requires three capacities: expressiveness, language processing and cognition, the third of which could be reckoned as deverbalization. Bassnet (2002) points out that translation involves not only substitution of words and grammar from the cultural context of language. Therefore, equivalence in translation is not about seeking sameness, and it's very dangerous to impose the value system of the source language onto the target language. Bao Gang (2014) discussed interpreting phenomenon, such as understanding of the original language, thinking, expression of the target language and tried to unveil the inner mechanism of these phenomenon in his book *Introducing Interpreting Studies*. Zhang Jiliang (2011) researched on the triangular model of the Interpretive Theory and pointed out that it is the foundation of interpreting.

On training models, Gile proposed the process model for consecutive interpreting—consecutive interpreting is performed in two phases, the comprehension phase (or listening and note-taking phase), and the speech production (or reformulation) phase. Pöchhacker identified the interactive model for interpreting which stresses the importance of socioeconomic background for interpreters. Hatim and Mason proposed a model using the discourse theory which holds structure as the most important thing in consecutive interpreting. Anderson proposed a triangular model and pointed out that an interpreter is an active participant in communication. All these models identify the process of consecutive interpreting and what interpreters should do in interpreting.

On empirical studies, Bai Jiafang (2011) found that training on listening comprehension in interpreting could improve beginners' quality on output. Fu Rongbo (2012) concluded that it is necessary for student interpreters to strengthen their monitor on output and improve efficiency. Wang Jianhua (2010) used an interactive interpreting model on memory training and dramatically improved students' completeness, accuracy and fluency on delivering information. Hong Lei and Wang Binhua (2011) explained deviation in consecutive interpreting from the perspective of effort model. All these empirical studies reach conclusion from a certain perspective and is of far-reaching significance for interpreting training.

The prevailing teaching method is still the traditional mode of cassette, note-taking and teacher's comments. Of course, it has its own merits. It can create on-the-spot interpreting atmosphere and concentrate students' mind on encoding-storage-decoding-output. By commenting on their performance, the students can realize their deficiencies in mentality, language proficiency and encyclopedic knowledge. So the traditional method has its place in teaching. But teachers often focus on the surface equivalence between the source language and the target language and ignore communication as the core of interpreting. This is contrary to the central task of interpreting teaching.

This paper is designed to compare and analyze the quality between surface interpreting and communicative interpreting by combing teaching practice and propose effective teaching strategies with Interpretive Theory.

II. EXAMINING THE PROCESS OF CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETING

A. The Process of Consecutive Interpreting

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A consecutive interpreter listens to the speaker, takes notes, and when the speaker finishes one segment, he reproduces the speech in the target language accurately and completely. The consecutive interpreter mainly relies on memory, and note-taking is an essential skill. Consecutive interpreting involves many skills, such as short-term memory, note-taking, theme-identifying, reorganization of the target language, public speaking and so on (Zhong Weihe, 2007). Therefore, only by listening, analyzing, note-taking and output is far from satisfactory in delivering interpretation. In order to establish an effective training model, it is necessary to explain the process of consecutive interpreting from the perspective of cognitive psychology.

Cognitive psychology focuses on sense, notice, memory and information. It discloses the inner mechanism of information processing. When the speaker's voice enters the interpreter's ear, he listens carefully and stores the information in his brain with short-term memory and notes. After the speech segment, he analyzes the information and uses logic to deliver output.

B. Hypothesis on Consecutive Interpreting Training Model

Before class, a teacher could hand out materials to two or three students and ask them to prepare and give presentation in class in the form of public speeches. On the one hand, they could consolidate their language usage; on the other hand, they could familiarize themselves with background knowledge. On class, the students giving presentation could be asked to play the role of the speaker, and take notes as the speech outline. After class, evaluate their performance from a speaker's perspective.

There are three hypotheses:

1. Improving declarative and procedural knowledge by means of public speeches could more effectively increase an interpreter's background knowledge, reduce pressure and improve interpreting output;
2. Increasing student interpreters' public speech awareness could increase their confidence, cope with difficulties flexibly and improve the credibility and smoothness of output;
3. Rethinking the performance from a speaker's perspective could improve student interpreters' professional capacity and quality in a sense.

III. EMPIRICAL STUDY

A. Experimental Tool

The author uses SPSS, one of the most popular software in the world, as the experimental tool. SPSS is mainly used for scientific research and has powerful functions, such as data compiling and management, statistics analysis and computer graphics. It could ensure that data is representative.

B. Subject

The author has conducted an interpreting experiment on twenty-four postgraduates in Qingdao. He chooses fifteen postgraduates as the experiment group and the other fifteen as the control group. They all had received a term of basic interpreting training and had little experience in interpreting. Besides, there are five teachers as judges.

The postgraduate exam scores does not vary greatly. To ensure the rationality of the study, the author has conducted a test of the two groups' consecutive interpreting. See list 1 for results.

LIST 1
RESULTS FOR THE EXPERIMENTAL GROUP AND CONTROL GROUP BEFORE EXPERIMENT

	Experiment Group	Control Group	T Value	P Value
Test result	61.882	62.139	0.043	0.879

According to statistics, $p > 0.05$. It shows that the two groups do not have much difference in their capability of consecutive interpreting, so the results are typical.

C. Process and Design

The consecutive class the author teaches totals six-four classes, which ensures enough time. This paper uses an audio about financial crisis lasting three minutes and twenty-one seconds as the testing material. The experimental group had received training about financial crisis before experiment and evaluation of their classroom performance before. Besides, they have time to prepare for the topic. The experiment takes recording of the students' performance and replay it after experiment. Then the teachers will give mark on the spot. And finally, questionnaires for students.

D. Analysis and Discussion

The evaluation includes language, expression, intonation, logic, eye contact and information.

LIST 2
EVALUATION OF TWO GROUPS AFTER THE EXPERIMENT

	Experiment Group	Control Group	T Value	P Value
Language	4.17	2.46	-3.25	0.013
Expression	3.24	2.77	-1.17	0.037
Intonation	3.67	3.28	0.86	0.056
Logic	4.28	2.97	-4.21	0.019
Eye Contact	3.67	2.44	-2.23	0.034
Information	3.93	2.89	0.66	0.018
Total	3.97	2.94	3.27	0.021

From the list, we can see that the p value of all items is lower than 0.05 except intonation. It shows that the performance varies greatly after the experiment. Great difference exists in language, logic and information, which reflects that background knowledge and terminology play an active role in activating long-term memory. The results of expression and eye contact show the role of evaluation in interpreting.

LIST 3
QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is the effect of preparation?	A. Large (73.3)	B. medium (20)	C. small (6.67)	D. no (0)
2. Does similar experience count?	A. large (80)	B. medium (20)	C. small (0)	D. no (0)
3. What is the role of evaluation on CI?	A. large (33.3)	B. medium (40)	C. small (20)	D. no (6.67)
4. Hour spent in doing CI exercises?	A.>3h(6.67)	B.2h(13.3)	C.1h(46.7)	D.无(33.3)
5. The role of public speaking on CI	A. large (40)	B. medium (26.7)	C. small (33.3)	D. no (0)
6. The effect of specialized knowledge	A. large (60)	B. medium (40)	C. small (0)	D. no (0)

The questionnaire reveals that all students agree that similar experience is of great help to performance. The great effect of preparation and specialized knowledge reflect the key role of declarative memory on information processing and logic. And the great effect of evaluation reaffirms the positive role of rethink and rectification.

IV. TEACHING STRATEGIES

A. Convey the Intended Meaning of the Source Language

Interpreting is basically about communication. Therefore, we should not pay great attention to finding equivalences in the target language. On formal occasions, an interpreter often has to interpret complicated sentences and face more pressure. In this context, it is very important to convey the intended meaning of the original language. Let's look at the speech segment delivered by Obama, the president of the US: The tax cuts are a very important issue facing us today. Because it's a big diverse country and people have a lot of complicated positions, it means that in order to get stuff done, we're going to compromise.

Some students interpreted "get stuff done" into "finish it". On the surface of it, we could not find fault in the translation. But after deliberations, we might ask: "what does it refers to?" The faulty version is attributable to neglect of context. As a matter of fact, the speech segment has already mentioned "tax cuts". Therefore, we may use "to achieve tax cuts" to substitute "finish it" so that the version could become crystal clear.

B. Apply Speech Act Theory in Teaching Interpreting

Speech Act Theory, an important theory of pragmatics, was proposed by English philosopher John Austin at the late 1950s. It reveals the fundamental of language communication from philosophical perspective in a view to answer the question of what do we do when using languages.

According to this mode, we can do three things while speaking: locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act (Dai Weidong&He Zhaoxiong, 2002). Locutionary act refers to action expressed by words, phrases and clauses. Illocutionary act refers to action expressing as speakers intentions. And perlocutionary act refers to action caused by an incident.

For example: You have left the door wide open. The speaker's locutionary act is the surface meaning of these words. His illocutionary act is the intention of the speech: please close the door, or make complaints about the open door etc. His perlocutionary act is the effect of the speech. If the listener understands what the speaker means, then the speaker has get his message across to the listener. The most important of these three acts is the illocutionary act, because it is the intention of a speaker that is to be conveyed, and it holds the key to successful communication.

In interpreting teaching, we are often confronted with similar problems. Sometimes, we know all the words in the sentence, but we can't express the real meaning. Then we should deliberate on what the speaker really means.

For example, Charlene Barshevsky had said "Shall we shake hands now?" during the WTO talk between China and US. Let's analyze it with Speech Act Theory. Locutionary act: Shake hands. Illocutionary act: Can we reach a deal now? Perlocutionary act: The deal is reached. How can we interpret it? We all know that China was confronted with all kinds of obstacles in entering the WTO. After numerous bargains, both China and US had made concessions. The true meaning of the sentence is: Can we reach a deal now? This is the intended meaning of Barshevsky.

In interpreting classes, we should ask students to gain background knowledge beforehand, or explain some

knowledge before training. Only in this way can we improve the quality of their output.

C. *Make Full Use of the Benefits of “Deverbalization”*

Interpreting is a process of realizing the senses of an idea (Seleskovitch&Lederer, 1984). We have noticed that we tend to forget the form of a language after seven to eight seconds of consecutive speaking and realize the senses of an idea. The so-called “deverbalization” is to forget the words or phrases used by the speaker and realize the senses of a speech. In this way, we can express our ideas in the target language freely. When students master the skill of deverbalization, they can find idiomatic expressions in their mother tongue and express ideas correctly.

An interpreting teacher should not try to compare two languages. On the contrary, he or she should try to tell students to separate the forms of the two languages. In the teaching process, a teacher should not focus on the form of the original language, but translation of meaning. He or she should remind students of other elements that could make ideas clear besides languages. He or she should play the speech again and let student gain a better understanding of the original language. Interpreting involves three stages. It is not difficult to let students understand the process: original language—deverbalization—target language, but students are used to find word equivalence between the two languages rather than equivalence of value. So it is not easy to let them stick to the process.

When we use a language to communicate, deverbalization is a natural process without our realizing it. But when an idea is interpreted into another, it is not easy. Many students consider interpreting as a process of finding equivalence to another. But without deverbalization, we can only find equivalents without identifying the true meaning of the original speaker.

Only by deverbalization can we interpret accurately. The reason why it is very difficult for students to achieve this goal, on one hand, is that students tend to learn a foreign language in an inappropriate environment. They can hardly master two language systems at the same time. On the other hand, people usually identify words and phrases of two languages together, as the method in our foreign language teaching. So beginning interpreters always fall into the trap instead of re-expressing what they have understood. In this case, a teacher should stress that it seldom works on most occasions.

D. *Prepare Fully before Interpreting to Improve the Effect of Interpreting*

An Interpreter must adopt an attitude of intellectual modesty and willingness to learn, keeping up with changes in his or her languages as well as current events and the related jargon (Nolan, 2005). Consecutive Interpreting exacts a high demand on an interpreter’s language proficiency and encyclopedic knowledge. Any weakness could damage the effect of consecutive interpreting. Therefore, teachers can hand out articles of current affairs to students so that they can familiarize with it, or explain in detail before interpreting so that specialized knowledge do not become an obstacle to interpreting.

Total mastery of a language is a prerequisite of consecutive interpreting. An interpreter proficient at a language can grasp or guess the main intent of a speaker in a short time by his acute hearing, rich vocabulary and good sense of intuition. Therefore, a beginner should read widely, such as *The Economist* and *The National Geographic*, to familiarize with relevant vocabulary and phrases; read his native classic works to gain a better understanding of his country’s profound language and culture.

Moreover, the more encyclopedic knowledge a student has, the more thorough understanding he will gain of a specialized field. Then he can give full play of his long-term memory to relieve the burden of short-term memory. A teacher could divide students into groups before class, ask them to get access to some background materials and give presentation in class. This method could greatly improve their capacity of self-study and create a sound atmosphere in class.

E. *Turn Classroom into Conference and Train Interpreters’ Capabilities*

Two changes should be noticed from the interpreting market in the recent two years: professionalism of interpreting and the changing environment brought by globalization and new technologies. Therefore, a teacher should be market-oriented, and take employment as opportunities to nurture students’ interpreting and professional capabilities.

In consecutive Interpreting classes, a speaker tends to be a teacher while listeners tend to be classmates, so there is little pressure to bear. But in international conferences, an interpreter sits or stands beside a speaker and bears much pressure. To reduce pressure, a teacher could invite business representatives to act as speakers and organize overseas students as listeners to simulate conferences. This will put pressure to bear on students to unleash their potential.

Public speaking is an important part of training to become an interpreter for several reasons. Many people studious enough to have acquired a thorough grasp of two or more working languages tend to be of a somewhat shy and retiring disposition and, when faced with an audience, many freeze up and develop mental blocks (Nolan, 2005). In consecutive interpreting, teachers should pay attention to improve students’ basic public speaking skills, such as personal appearance, gesture, pitch, pronunciation and pause. On one hand, it could boost students’ confidence; on the other hand, it is for professional requirements.

F. *Establish Evaluation Mechanism*

Only by evaluating the interpreting performance can students know what needs to be improved in the future.

Therefore, after each interpreting, a student should know what he or she needs to improve. The evaluation should focus on three aspects.

First, mastery of languages. Can students fully understand the meaning of a speaker immediately by intuition? Can students resist the interference of a foreign language? Second, method. If a student makes methodological mistakes, it shows that he or she is not mature enough to do interpreting in international conferences. Third, some mistakes. The mistakes should not exceed one third of the total. So a teacher should point out in classroom whether the mistakes a student makes is language-induced, method-induced or others?

Small mistakes would not cause serious consequences. No matter how experienced an interpreter is, he will make mistakes. Lack of concentration, unclear voices through the phone or fatigue could cause mistakes. All these mistakes are small enough to be neglected. If a student has not achieved a certain level of language proficiency, then he or she should improve it in a foreign country for a time. We should also see whether a student interpreter can express an idea clearly, consistently and accurately.

V. CONCLUSION

With the rapid development of China's economy, high-quality and specialized interpreters are needed all the more than ever before. Interpreting serves as an important bridge in foreign exchanges and cooperation. And interpreters have played and will continue to play an important role in our economic development and social progress. It is our social imperative to produce high-quality interpreters. So China has set up MTI—Masters of Translation and Interpreting to meet these needs.

In recent years, many Chinese universities have set up such courses without paying attention to improving quality of teaching. Interpreting is attached to other subjects; interpreting and translation are not separated; interpreting lack international exchanges; teaching materials are uniform. All these have caused problems in producing talents.

Currently, a few schools such as Beijing Foreign Studies University, Shanghai International Studies University and Guangdong Foreign Studies University in China produce interpreters. So it is very difficult for many universities to recruit qualified teachers. Besides, it is very easy to fall into the trap of focusing on exercise instead of output. We cannot see the wood for the trees in this way.

Therefore, interpreting teachers have great responsibilities to produce quality interpreters. First, a teacher should transform his or her teaching framework. Teaching is not just about exercises. We should link teaching with corresponding theories and pay attention to output. Second, we should make full use of deverbilization. It is to interpret the true meaning of the original speech instead of individual words and phrases. Only by combining theory and practice can we improve the quality of teaching. Third, we should evaluate the performance of student interpreters. We can ask the interpreters themselves the performance that needs to be improved, and then give our thoughts about their performance. By combining these two evaluations, we can reduce their errors in the future so that they will improve themselves.

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