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Article abstract

Weller (1990) believes that Krashen's concept of "comprehensible input" can play a key role in the simultaneous interpretation process even though this concept is most frequently cited in relation to second and foreign language learning. The "comprehensible input" concept is referred to here as the spoken or written pieces of information that are understood and interpreted by the hearer. Such information comes in the form of words, sentences, utterances, or even paragraphs.Based on Weller's recommendation, Krashen's concept is used as a framework for this study to analyze compensatory strategies employed by a small group of Jordanian interpreters who worked for an American television network during the Gulf War.This paper first examines the type of input that causes problems for interpreters.Second, it examines the strategies these interpreters use to compensate for difficult or incomprehensible input. The findings of the study detected five types of compensatory strategies that were employed by four interpreters. These strategies were grouped into two general types: achievement and reduction. These are discussed with recommendations at the end in the hope of providing more insight into how human beings process language under conditions of stress.

On the Use of Compensatory Strategies in Simultaneous Interpretation

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RÉSUMÉ

Weller (1990) considère que le concept d'«entrée compréhensible» énoncé par Krashen peut jouer un rôle clé dans le processus de l'interprétation simultanée, même si ce concept se voit surtout évoqué en rapport avec l'apprentissage d'une langue seconde ou étrangère. Le concept d'«entrée compréhensible» désigne ici les bribes d'information parlées ou écrites comprises ou exprimées par l'auditeur. De telles informations prennent la forme de mots, de phrases, d'expressions ou même de paragraphes.

Tel que l'a recommandé Weller, le concept énoncé par Krashen sert de cadre de travail à la présente étude afin d'analyser les stratégies palliatives utilisées par un petit groupe d'interprètes jordaniens qui ont travaillé pour un réseau de télévision des États-Unis au cours de la guerre du Golfe.

Ce document étudie d'abord le type d'entrée qui pose un problème aux interprètes. Il examine ensuite les stratégies que l'interprète utilise afin de pallier une entrée problématique ou incompréhensible. Les résultats de cette étude ont dégagé l'usage de cinq types de stratégies palliatives chez quatre interprètes, lesquelles peuvent être réduites à deux grandes classes : réalisation et réduction. L'étude de ces notions et les recommandations émises en conclusion cherchent à fournir une compréhension accrue de la façon dont l'être humain traite la langue dans des conditions de stress.

ABSTRACT

Weller (1990) believes that Krashen's concept of "comprehensible input" can play a key role in the simultaneous interpretation process even though this concept is most frequently cited in relation to second and foreign language learning. The "comprehensible input" concept is referred to here as the spoken or written pieces of information that are understood and interpreted by the hearer. Such information comes in the form of words, sentences, utterances, or even paragraphs.

Based on Weller's recommendation, Krashen's concept is used as a framework for this study to analyze compensatory strategies employed by a small group of Jordanian interpreters who worked for an American television network during the Gulf War.

This paper first examines the type of input that causes problems for interpreters. Second, it examines the strategies these interpreters use to compensate for difficult or incomprehensible input. The findings of the study detected five types of compensatory strategies that were employed by four interpreters. These strategies were grouped into two general types: achievement and reduction. These are discussed with recommendations at the end in the hope of providing more insight into how human beings process language under conditions of stress.

MOTS-CLÉS/KEYWORDS

comprehensible input, second and foreign language learning,

Introduction

The notion of reception-based theories in second language acquisition research is generally assumed to be limited to questions of learning a second language. For example, Krashen's input hypothesis (1985), which emphasizes the need for comprehension of input data to process information, is most frequently cited in relation to second language acquisition. However, Weller (1990) rightly claims that Krashen's concept of "comprehensible input" can play a key role in the process of simultaneous interpretation. This claim seems reasonable especially when observing that without an adequate level of comprehensible input, mental translation from one language to another and subsequent verbal production will be negatively affected. It is, therefore, quite relevant to make use of some theoretical positions found in language learning and/or language acquisition research by relating them to interpreting ability.

Second language acquisition, Krashen (1985: 57) argues, depends on having a comprehensible input before the learner's internal processing mechanism can work. That is, learners will not be able to comprehend input that contains more linguistic features than their current knowledge. Input here refers to the target language samples to which the learners are exposed. Krashen postulates that in order for language to advance from one stage to another, it must have "comprehension input" which is a little beyond its current level of competence, or, in other words i+1.[1]

One can clearly notice that Krashen here aims at second language acquisition/ learning and language teaching, not simultaneous interpretation. However, it seems that this is the same basic process interpreters use to improve their performance. How can both learners and interpreters understand language that contains lexicon and structures a little beyond their current level? They quite often use more than their linguistic competence to help them understand: they use context, their knowledge of the world and any type of extralinguistic information available to them among others (El-Shiyab 1994). In attempting to show the challenge facing an interpreter during the process of performance, which is similar in many ways to the challenge facing a second language speaker during a difficult conversation task, Weller (1990) states:

> One (an interpreter) never knows what is waiting around the bend when one accepts a commitment to interpret. It is precisely this professional challenge, a type of linguistic and emotional roller coaster, that keeps the interpreter on his toes. Experienced interpreters do not only know more vocabulary, how to better control their voice, how to handle a wider variety of accents, etc., but they have more strategies for dealing with the unknown features of i+1.

We can observe, therefore, that both interpreters and L2 speakers resort to strategies to deal with a difficult performance task.

The Nature of Simultaneous Interpretation (SI)

Henderson (1982: 149) maintains that SI involves three phases:

1. The listening to another person element, which comes first both logically and chronologically, the raw material the interpreter gathers and from which he devises his output.
2. Where the problem lies, what exactly happens? How is it done? The interpreter's business is not words but ideas or message elements. Only in the most elementary cases can

simultaneous interpretation be conceived as a simple transposition of source-language utterances. The interpreter is continually involved in evaluating, filtering and editing (information, not words) in order *to make sense of the incoming message and to ensure that his output, too, makes sense.*

3. The active form of spontaneous speech. He clarifies that in phase 2, simultaneous interpretation differs radically from the familiar processes of spontaneous speech where he gives verbal form to our own thoughts, while the message the interpreter handles comes from an outside source; the interpreter is attending to two different activities at the same time and must pay attention to the incoming message and also give conscious and critical attention to his own speech output.

Hendricks (1971: 7), on the other hand, divides SI into four stages:

1. Listening, i.e., perception of sounds.
2. Comprehension, i.e., grasping the sense of the sounds.
3. Translation, i.e., transforming the sense into the corresponding linguistic units or into another language.
4. Phonation, i.e., articulating, producing the new speech utterance.

Both Henderson and Hendricks, as well as other researchers such as Seleskovitch (1978) seem to agree that SI is a highly demanding cognitive task involving a basic psycholinguistic process.

1st Reception of the message through listening and understanding the source language.
2nd Mental translation through decoding the message and finding equivalents in the interpreter's target language competence.
3rd Production of the subject in the target language.

These processes require the interpreter to monitor, store and retrieve the input of the source language continuously in order to produce the oral rendition of this input in the target language.

Le Ny (1978: 295) says that, "the principal problem posed in any translation is actually the non-concordance between the semantic structures of two given languages." It is clear that the "mental gymnastics" required to perform this type of difficult linguistic and cognitive operation will force even professional interpreters to resort to a kind of groping for words, a kind of lexical or synthetic search strategies, i.e. "compensatory strategies" as this is the term used in the present study. They employ these strategies especially when they have a much shorter chain of i+1.

Compensatory Strategies

In language production, achievement strategies are used by L2 speakers when faced with communication problems. Achievement strategies are also used to compensate for insufficient means by confronting the problem and by making the effort to retrieve the required linguistic items, and thereby reaching a solution. Reduction strategies, on the other hand, are attempts to avoid a communicative problem without being able to develop an alternative plan, and this may result in changing the original communicative goal. On the basis of these two different approaches to problem-solving, L2 speakers either adopt an achievement behavior with ease, or rely on an avoidance behavior without much success in communication.

Faerch and Kasper (1980: 92) were the first to use the term "compensatory strategies" for achievement strategies. They define compensatory strategies as "potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal". However, this term is used in the present study to include both achievement and reduction strategies to describe the interpretation data collected which is based on recorded transcripts of simultaneous interpretations by four Jordanian interpreters. It is worth mentioning here that compensatory strategies constitute a subset of communication strategies.

Along the same lines, Tarone (1981: 285) defines communication strategies as "a speaker's attempt to communicate meaningful content in the face of some apparent deficiencies in the interlanguage strategies, and to distinguish them from those that promote learning or language production." A communication strategy, according to Tarone, must be a mutual attempt on the part of the interlocutors "to agree on a meaning in a situation where the requisite structures do not seem to be shared" (1980: 420). In this framework, Tarone establishes three criteria that must be present in a communication strategy:

1.   A speaker desires to communicate meaning X to a listener.
2.   The speaker believes the linguistic or sociolinguistic structure desired to communicate meaning X is unavailable, or is not shared with the listener.
3.   The speaker chooses to:
     – avoid/abandon his attempt to communicate meaning X.
     – attempt alternative means to communicate meaning X. The speaker stops trying alternatives when it seems clear to him that there is shared meaning (1980: 419).

It is to be noted that communication strategies have met with growing interest by researchers in applied linguistics. Some of these studies include Tarone et al (1976), Corder (1978), Faerch and Kasper (1983), Poulisse et al (1984), Labarca and Khanji (1986), Biolystok (1990), and Khanji (1996). These studies, among others, attempted to answer questions regarding the relationship between L2 language proficiency and the use of certain types of strategies, or the relationship between comprehensibility and the effectiveness of using strategies.

Until now, no research to the best of our knowledge (except for the seminal study by Weller, 1990) has been described spontaneous interpretation data from the perspective of compensatory strategies. This is due to the fact that the previous studies on strategies used were confined to data description of L2 learners rather than interpreters. The present study, therefore, aims at describing compensatory strategies employed by interpreters facing either incomprehensible input or information overload (Krashen's "i+1+1…").

Method and Data

Subjects: Four Jordanian interpreters working for the American television network CBS on a temporary basis served as subjects for this study. They worked on a part-time basis for the television company in Amman during the Gulf War in 1990/1991. Their age ranged from 30 to 44 years old. All were native speakers of Arabic, with strong verbal skills in English. Even though the four subjects did not practise interpretation professionally, they had a high level of proficiency in English as a result of

several years of formal study in Jordan and at least three years of informal exposure to English through exchange programs in English-speaking countries, trips, friendships or work experience by the two female subjects.

The researchers were asked along with other evaluators to assess their interpretation ability before they were chosen to work for the television network. The evaluation required interpretation from Arabic into English, and from English to Arabic. The present research is based on data collected for interpretation from English into Arabic.

Materials and Methodology

The English text material used for evaluating the candidates covered a wide range of general and political English topics audiotaped and videotaped from foreign and local radio and television news bulletins. The original talk was, therefore, in English and the interpretation into Arabic. Both were recorded on different cassettes and later transcribed. The analysis was then carried out by listening to the interpreted version and comparing it to the original version, both orally and after the transcription was made. The 4-hour recorded versions of the interpretations were analyzed to discover which compensatory strategies (successful or unsuccessful) were employed by the interpreters as well as which most affected meaning and the possible explanations that might shed light on the difficulties interpreters face during this every difficult process.

Analysis and Discussion

Certain types of compensatory strategies were detected, all of which provided data regarding stumbling blocks for interpretation quality, as well as the causes that underlie them. Time constraints, the nature of the input they received during the interpreting process, together with their own linguistic and extralinguistic strengths and weaknesses are some of the variables which may have led the interpreters to resort to either successful or unsuccessful strategies. These types of strategies were identified according to various typologies in the literature proposed by Corder (1978), Faerch and Kasper (1980; 1984), Labarca and Khanji (1986), and Weller (1990). Below is a discussion and definitions of the strategy types found in the study.

In our sample of 4 interpreters, a total number of 234 instances of compensatory strategies were recorded. The five most frequently used strategies were: skipping (31%), approximation (25%), filtering (21%, comprehension omissions (14%), and substitution (9%). Table 1 shows the type, number and frequency of compensatory strategies employed by the interpreters.

Table 1: Types, number, and frequency of compensatory strategies employed by interpreters

Strategy Type	Number of Strategies Used by Individual Interpreters				Total Number for Each Strategy Used	Frequency
	S1	S2	S3	S4		
Skipping	19	17	22	14	72	31%
Approximation	14	13	12	20	59	25%
Filtering	15	10	11	13	49	21%
Comprehension Omissions	9	8	9	7	33	14%
Substitution	6	8	4	3	21	9%
Total					234	100%

S = stands for both subject and interpreter

Skipping

Based on our teaching experience, this strategy was used when interpreters avoided single words for many possible reasons: (a) incomprehensible input, i.e. the interpreter did not know the meaning of the term "jeers", (b) the interpreter decided that "jeers" and "violence" were repetitive and that violence covered the meaning enough, and (c) the interpreter was lagging behind the speaker. All these are possible reasons for using a skipping strategy. Skipping was the most widely observed strategy among the other types of strategies. It accounted for 31% of the instances of strategies used. Since this strategy is governed by avoidance behaviour on the part of the interpreter, it can be classified as a reduction type of strategy because interpreters who employed it attempted to do away with a lexical problem facing them during the interpretation process. The following instances from the data show that interpreters never gave a lexical equivalent in Arabic for the incomprehensible lexical item in English, which sometimes resulted in inaccurate interpretation.

Source Language Text (English)	Target Language (Arabic) Versions of the Interpretation
The French Minister was greeted with jeers and violence.	The French Minister was greeted with violence.
They were all very glum and kept complaining that it was impossible to catch up with Western military technology.	They were all very … and kept complaining that it was impossible to catch up with Western military technology.
In the Senate today, the $15 billion appropriation bill was approved by a vote of 98 to 1.	In the Senate today, the $15 billion bill was approved by a vote of 98 to 1.
It named the Missile a "the shale stone," reference to a story in the Koran.	It names the missile as a kind of stone, a reference to a story in the Koran.

Approximation

Interpreters resorted to this kind of strategy apparently when there was no time for details. The interpreters in this case attempted to reconstruct the optimal meaning by giving less precise meaning of a word or an expression in the target language instead

of the required lexical expression in the source language. Since enough semantic components were given in most cases for the offered form without negatively influencing the meaning of the intended message, approximation can be considered an achievement strategy. This is because interpreters attempted to solve a semantic problem directly by developing an alternative and successful plan and by expanding their semantic competence resources, rather than by reducing the content of their intended message. Approximation was the second most frequently used strategy, accounting for 25% of the cases. Below are some examples from the data:

Source Language Text (English)	Target Language (Arabic) Versions
Iran has <u>embarked</u> on a methodological campaign…	Iran has <u>launched</u> a methodological campaign.
In Damascus, the Syrian radio said that fighting had <u>spilled</u> into Tikrit	In Damascus, the Syrian radio said that <u>there was fighting</u> in Tikrit
to <u>patch up</u> their historical hatreds.	<u>to agree</u> among themselves.
Press and public largely <u>acquiesced</u> in this disclosure of only selected information.	Press and public <u>welcomed</u> this disclosure of only selected information.
East European governments that once belonged <u>to the defunct</u>, Soviet-led Warso Pact.	East European governments that once belonged <u>to the former</u> Soviet-led Warso Pact…

Filtering

This strategy was used when interpreters tried to compress the length of an utterance in order to find an economic way of expression. In so doing, interpreters seem to have preserved the semantic content of the message. Filtering is different from skipping in that interpreters are not necessarily facing a problem with the difficulty of economizing by reducing the length of an utterance. Consequently, filtering is another type of achievement strategy. It was the third most used strategy used by interpreters, accounting for 21% of the cases observed. It must be noticed that unlike approximation strategy, filtering always meant the compression of the message, which consequently affected the length of the interpreted utterances as in the following examples:

Source Language Text (English)	Target Language (Arabic) Versions
There's nothing new in wartime about exaggerated claims of success of <u>inflammatory charges of atrocities</u>.	There's nothing new in wartime about exaggerated claims of success.
<u>Smoldering fires</u> of tension throughout the region have been fanned as countries are drawn into the sphere of confrontation.	Tension is increasing among countries drawn into confrontation in the region.
The king visited <u>frontline units of the 12th Royal Mechanized Division</u>.	The king visited <u>an army unit</u>.

Incomplete Sentences

Unlike the skipping strategy, the provision of incomplete sentences as a strategy was used when interpreters omitted larger units of the text. From our teaching experience and analysis and discussions of students' samples in interpretation courses, we believe that the provision of incomplete sentences may have resulted from a failure in text comprehension, i. e. the interpreter was not able to catch up with the speaker and therefore was unable to figure out the meaning of these larger units. In such cases, interpreters initially made an attempt to start interpreting units of the text, which caused comprehension problems, but then gave up and cut short by stopping in mid-sentence. The provision of incomplete sentences is clearly an example of reduction strategy. It accounted for 14% of the 234 instances of strategies used by interpreters. Here are some examples:

Source Language Text (English)	Target Language (Arabic) Versions
They don't have complete control of all lines of communications or transportation. They haven't really stonewalled us	They don't have complete control of all lines of communications or transportation. They …
Baker did not act like a tough businessman or the duck hunter with Israel assigned to the role of scared duck at bay	Baker did not act like a tough businessman or the duck hunter with Israel …
In the bewildering thicket of rebel claims, it is unclear exactly what is happening	In the … it is unclear exactly what is happening in spite of rebel claims

Substitution

This strategy was employed when interpreters used a lexical item in the target language which did not communicate the desired concept nor did it basically retain the meaning of the item in the source language. All cases of substitution in the data are considered to be reduction strategies since the substantial change of meaning quite often resulted in awkward rendition. Substitution accounted for 9% and was thus the least frequent type of the strategy used by all interpreters. Below are some examples of this strategy:

Source Language Text (English)	Target Language (Arabic) Versions
Collateral damage	a lot of damage
Soviets vote in unity showdown	Soviets vote in a unity referendum
But the gulf crisis jarred perceptions	But the gulf crisis changed perceptions
The greatest subversion brought by the war is the thousands of satellite television dishes	The greatest problem brought by the war are the thousands of television dishes

Final Remarks

In conclusion, what do these preliminary observations on a small sample of interpreters suggest? It seems, as Taylor (1990) and Weller (1990) have observed, that student interpreters and professional interpreters tend to have an overwhelming

need to "crowd" in as much of the source text as possible, with the result that some elements of the message are lost in the interpretation that follows. This tendency can often be observed when they use some types of compensatory strategies such as filtering or queuing.[2] However, we still attribute the use of reduction strategies in this study, such as skipping, comprehension omissions and substitution to the "incomprehensible input" factor, among other factors discussed above. This explanation means that the interpreters' particular stage of linguistic development did not enable them to process either incomprehensible messages and/or information load (Krashen's "i+1+1+1") satisfactorily.

It is hoped that this study will awaken the interest of researchers in similar topics. Of particular interest to courses of simultaneous interpretation is the subject of how to apply these observations to improve teaching.[3] As far as teaching interpretation is concerned, and since it is difficult to separate strategy use from formal mastery of the language, it would be logical to conclude that compensatory strategies of achievement in particular must be addressed within any interpretation course. Such strategies may give students of interpreting insights on how to grasp the main points in an argument, for example, with the filtering strategy. Filtering is a particularly useful strategy, especially for dealing with rapidly delivered speeches when it is quite impossible to convey everything and decisions about priorities must be made on the spot. This study, therefore, recommends examining the possibilities of teaching interpretation students how to employ some analytic strategies, such as learning the range of solutions and the ways in which these solutions or strategies can be applied effectively. This could be a particularly useful teaching technique for dealing with fast delivered speeches in simultaneous interpreting, knowing that it is not always possible to convey everything since decisions about priorities must be made at once. More achievement strategies need to be identified by researchers in order to create exercises and practice methods designed to enhance the use of such strategies when teaching interpreting.

NOTES

1.   (i+l) means moving from (i), the current level, to (i+l), the next level.
2.   Queuing, as a strategy, appeared only twice in this study. It means delaying responses during heavy load periods and then catching up during any lulls that occur.
3.   See Fetzler (1996), who advocates teaching communicative strategies from a propositionally and interpersonally oriented perspective in a second language acquisition context.

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