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Exploring the Challenges of Consecutive Interpretation Task in Political Settings Press Conferences as a Case Study

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Abstract:

Language mediation in the world of politics is decidedly an intricate task that requires the language mediator to be highly alert and vigilant. It covers myriad forms of political communication ranging from international conferences, private meetings to press conferences. In press conferences, the consecutive interpreter is not only tasked with rendering the interpretation but also dealing with factors that could affect the quality and strategies of consecutive interpretation. The data for this research is mainly collected from a press conference between President Obama and the Emir of Kuwait. The present study is a descriptive-analytical study, aiming to have an in-depth analysis of consecutive interpretation under the framework proposed by Gile's Model (2009). The findings revealed several factors and challenges that influence the quality of interpretation in political settings.

Key words: consecutive interpreting, political, challenges, strategies, tactics.

ملخص:

تُعتبر الوساطة اللغوية في عالم السياسة مهمة معقدة تتطلب أن يكون الوسيط اللغوي في حالة تأهب وبقظة للغاية حيث تغطي الوساطة اللغوية عددًا لا يحصى من أشكال الاتصال السياسي بدءًا من المؤتمرات الدولية والاجتماعات الخاصة إلى المؤتمرات الصحفية. لا يقتصر دور المترجم الفوري في المؤتمرات الصحفية على تقديم الترجمة فحسب، بل يتعامل أيضًا مع عدد من العوامل التي يمكن أن تؤثر على جودة الترجمة التتابعية واستراتيجياتها. تم جمع بيانات هذا البحث بشكل أساسي من مؤتمر صحفي جمع بين الرئيس باراك أوباما وأمير الكويت آنذاك. اعتمدت هذه الدراسة على منهجية التحليل الوصفي من أجل الوصول إلى تحليل متعمق للعملية التتابعية من خلال تحليل البيانات ضمن الإطار الذي اقترحه نموذج الجهد لدانيال جيل (2009) حيث كشفت النتائج عن العديد من العوامل والتحديات التي تؤثر على جودة التفسير في السياقات السياسية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ترجمة تتابعية، مؤتمر، سياسة، تحديات، استراتيجيات.

1. Introduction:

In global world politics, consecutive interpreting remains an indispensable part as it ensures an online interpreting service for myriad forms of political events. One of the contexts where consecutive interpreting service is performed and requires a displacement of official interpreters is political press conferences where interpreters have to deal with a double-edged situation: conveying the meaning of the message accurately and keeping up with rigid political protocols. The present study is based on an analytical and explanatory methodology which comprises a video recording of a one political press conference that involves English-Arabic language pair. The different features of original speeches and versions of renditions for each item were thoroughly analyzed and compared in order to explore

different challenges and strategies employed by the interpreter, along with the consecutive interpreting tactics intended for pedagogical purposes proposed by Daniel Gile (2009).

2. Political interpreting:

Brown (2008) argues that there is no clear definition of political interpreting as it is not in common use in interpreting studies and is relatively new in interpreting studies since it has received little research in the field. Brown defines political interpreting as “any interpreting where either the primary participants or the topic discussed is political”. (Brown, 2008,p.8)

Political interpreting can be said to be related to any linguistic mediation that involves rendering oral text from one language to another by the use of oral modes: simultaneous and consecutive interpretation. Simultaneous interpreting is the widely used mode as it covers multilateral conferences, while consecutive interpreting is known to be used in small meetings, press conferences, one-on one meetings between heads of states. Brown (2008p) stipulates that consecutive interpreting is a form of dialogue interpreting as it covers “shorter, spontaneous and improvised dialogue ” in a political setting. (Brown 2008, p.8)

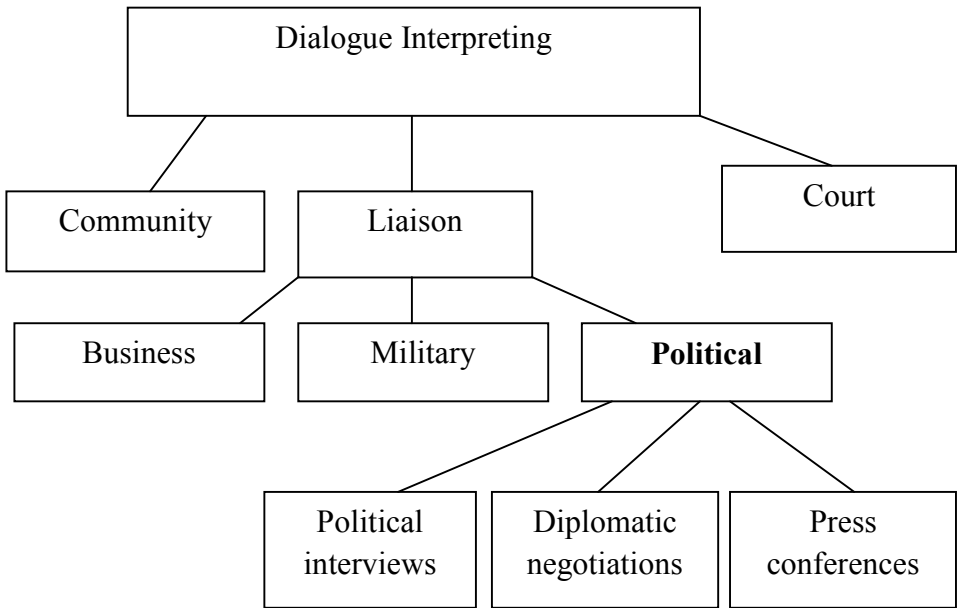


Figure1: Political interpreting as a subfield of dialogue interpreting (Brown, 2008.p15)

2.1 Consecutive interpreting mode:

The consecutive mode in interpreting is associated with the principal field of conference interpreting along with the other most used mode which is simultaneous interpreting. Although Consecutive has been described as the ‘noblest’ mode of interpreting, its utilization in world conferences has been in a sharp decline in comparison with simultaneous interpreting working mode (Aaic.2016). Consecutive interpreting is generally active in small gatherings such as press conferences, smaller

bilingual meetings, and workshop-like discussions, where it may assume the features of dialogue interpreting. (Pochhacker, 2012).

3. Literature Review:

Unanimously, there is still little research conducted in consecutive interpreting let alone the factor of languages such as the Arabic language and its impact on the validity of results obtained. However, a number of studies have been conducted with the sole aim of examining the quality of consecutive interpreting by outlining the problems and strategies used to overcome them. For instance, Yu Chunli, Nor Shahila Mansor, Lay Hoon Ang & Sharon Sharmini (2021) have discussed Factors Influencing (the Quality of Consecutive Interpretation from the Perspective of Interpreter) using an interview as a data collection method through which the researcher delves deeper into the intricacies of the task as well as the on-line challenges that may arise.

Many other Studies have opted for pedagogical-oriented research as a way of exploring the possible problems encountered by consecutive interpreting students and the strategies used to overcome them.

Marta Arumí Ribas (2013) conducted a study on strategies and interpreting problems encountered by two groups of students at two different stages of training. The study was intended for pedagogical purposes as it classifies the strategies used by students to resolve the difficulties and assesses the students' perceptions of their performances. The researcher concluded that expertise and constant practice are responsible for acquiring the

needed skills that are prerequisites to the consecutive interpreting process.

Ahmad Al-Harashseh, Ekrema Shehab, and Rafat Al-Rousan (2017) conducted a study on (Consecutive Interpretation Training: Challenges and Solutions) where the Arabic language was involved in the language combination of the research. The study delves into the problems trainee interpreters face in their consecutive interpreting classes by analyzing the strategies they used to weigh whether they have been successful in completing their task. Most of the challenges were linguistic problems, memory problems, note-taking, and reproducing the ST into the TL. The researchers concluded it is imperative therefore that interpreter training acquire a set of skills such as chunking, joining, shadowing, anticipating, listening, recalling and paraphrasing that can be used to solve the problems encountered.

As for the present study, the possible research gap we will try to bridge is to analyze the possible online challenges and strategies used by a consecutive interpreter in political settings. The study conducted used a descriptive analysis with the use of the observation method of a real press conference between two heads of state.

4.Methodology :Theoretical Framework:

The framework for analyzing consecutive interpretation challenges in this study is by Daniel Gile's (2009) taxonomy of challenges and tactics.

In this study, a consecutive interpretation quality is being discussed by analyzing the source discourse and the

interpretations including the challenges those interpreters may face according to Gile's model.

4.1 Data Collection and Analysis:

The data for this study were collected using the observation method. Then, the researcher transcribed the data by using soundsciber. After that, speaker designation was added to help clarify the speakers.

4.2 Findings:

This study explores the factors influencing the quality of consecutive interpretation hoping to explore further intricacies of consecutive interpretation in political settings.

4.3 Results:

After transcribing and comparing the source and the target speeches of the two press conferences in the following sections, we have analyzed the main problems and challenges the consecutive interpreter of this press conference faced and she dealt with them.

Challenges of consecutive interpreting in political settings are divided into the following subcategories according to the taxonomy of (Daniel Gile, 2009):

-online problems which include: cognitive reasons, occasional problems, and Problems associated with signal vulnerability.

- Language-specificity related problems which include: Possible language-specific differences in speech perception, Differences in the perception of words, grammatical redundancies, Syntactic structures, etc

The speaker factor: including, accent, tone, pronunciation, etc.

5. Online problems:

5.1 Cognitive saturation:

Cognitive saturation is often considered to be detrimental to speech rendition as it may lead to cognitive load. Gil (2009) thinks that "Saturation occurs through an increase in processing capacity requirements in the Short-term Memory Effort when the source language and target language are syntactically very different and force the interpreter to store a large amount of information for some time before being able to reformulate it in the target language" (Gile 2009,p.192)

It is believed that some languages can be syntactically different like English and Arabic which is often the case and can cause a cognitive load to the interpreter. Myriad reasons are behind such a cognitive saturation that can occur when the interpreter's extra-linguistic knowledge, background knowledge, knowledge of words and rules of grammar, etc are not sufficient enough to allow them to deal successfully with the requirements of the task. (Gile, 2009)

5.2 Chronic reasons due to grammar and lexical errors:

During this press conference that was held between the US president Barack Obama and the Emir of Kuwait to discuss and exchange opinions on the Arab region and the different political issues surrounding the region. The consecutive female interpreter was visibly at ease as the two parties were speaking at a reasonable pace; however, some problems arose as soon as the meeting has begun. According to Gile's online interpreting

problems, chronic reasons may refer to some grammar and lexical problems.

It was obvious that selecting adequate lexical items and grammatical decision-making during this press conference was somewhat difficult from the first sentences uttered by President Obama. Several mistakes have been noticed and are as follows:

- **Example of some lexical mistakes**
- **Example:**

The speaker: ‘Kuwait has been an outstanding **host** for our US forces during its operations in Iraq.’

The interpreter translated the sentence into:

الترجمة: كان الكويت ضيفا رائعا للقوات المسلحة العراقية عفوا للقوات الأمريكية في العراق

- The interpreter quickly corrected the blunder she unwittingly made (عفوا للقوات الأمريكية في العراق) while heedlessly continuing the task without noticing the mistake in the translation of TO HOST which should have been translated as مستضيف.

5.3 Long segments of speech:

- In accordance with Gile’s view (2009), it seems that interpreters are only competent when the total available processing capacity is larger than the capacity requirements. Otherwise, errors will occur due to a capacity deficit on the part of interpreters.
- In the following sentence, there was an error regarding the last part of the sentence:
- **The speaker:**

قدمنا مبادرة عربية ووفق عليها جميع الأطراف وسننفذها متى ما إسرائيل التزمت بما جاء في هذه الاتفاقية.

The interpretation: an Arab initiative that was agreed upon we will implement it when Israel fulfills its obligations.

A comparison between the source discourse and the interpretation will lead to the conclusion that the underlined sentence in the original speech is not reformulated clearly in the interpretation. Consequently, this omission can be considered as a violation of the principle of fidelity, and a further constraint for interpreters. The mismatch between the source text and the target text can be attributed to the interpreter's inability to cope with such a long segment. When dealing with the second-to-last sentence, the interpreter dropped the specific terms such as *convention*, *committed*. Therefore, One can perfectly assume that the interpreter suffers exhaustion of the capacity available.

6. Language-specificity related problems:

6.1 Syntactic structures of the source speech can affect the way the target message is rendered. Not only can the influence of the English language over the other language weighs heavily on the interpreter but it can also have them stick blindly to the source speech structure:

Example:

The source discourse: We are looking to make those relations even stronger.

الترجمة: نتطلع قدما لجعل هذه العلاقات حتى أكثر قوة.

Another similar instance where the interpreter stuck to the source speech structure but this time from Arabic into English:

..سعيد أن وزملائي بهذه الزيارة.

The interpreter rendered it literally by saying:

“ I’m delighted with my colleagues about this visit”’.

As a way of approaching the English natural structure, the interpreter should have said: “Glad that my colleagues and I made this visit”’.

according to Gile (2005), the assumption that “speech comprehension and speech production take up less processing capacity in one's native language than in one's non-native active language”, (Gile, 2005,p.9) may lead to opposite conclusions drawn upon this study especially when we know that processing capacity can nevertheless lead to cognitive saturation even when working from or into native and non-native languages. Sometimes Formality of the event (such as political press conference) can be the reason behind such a case especially when interpreting to high-rank leaders as Gile (2005) argued that language directionality is not based on research but on traditions.

6.2 Embedded structures:

Syntactic structures can facilitate comprehension and others make it more difficult by increasing processing capacity requirements, especially with respect to short-term memory (MacDonald, 1997). Embedded structures, in particular, seem to impose increased pressure on the Interpreter. In the following example, the interpreter had to omit the embedded sentences deliberately to avoid extra cognitive load:

Examples of embedded sentences:

The speaker: “I’m confident that, based on this conversation, an ongoing work between our two countries that we can

strengthen not only Kuwaiti-US relationships but also create a more stable region of peace and security.”

الترجمة: “-----فسنستمر العمل مع الكويت لنوطد من العلاقات الكويتية الأمريكية لنحدث منطقة أكثر استقرار من الأمن والسلام هناك.”

The high cognitive pressure to which interpreters are submitted could make them sensitive and vulnerable to small language-specific differences. Therefore, as a way of alleviating somewhat the heavy burden of embedded sentences, the interpreter sometimes opts for omission strategies. Ricardi (2005) argues that positive omission is considered to be an emergency strategy utilized by professional interpreters but cautiously, whereby the most important part of the message is translated and the less important is omitted.

6.3 Semantic redundancies:

Gile (2009) believes that grammatical redundancies are more numerous and frequent in some languages than in others. In the Arabic language, interpreters tend to make a repetitive series of words when in short of equivalent words. Thus, semantic redundancy of speech may be an important “working tool” serving as a support for interpreters.

Example:

The source discourse: it’s important for us to emphasize our gratitude to Kuwait and also our commitment to Kuwait security

الترجمة: نحن نؤكد ونشدد على امتناننا للكويت ونشدد على التزامنا حيال أمن الكويت.

7. The speaker factor:

7.1 Delivery mode:

During the press conference between President Obama and the Emir of Kuwait at the white house, the pace of speech was reasonable as the two parties perfectly understand the requirements for a consecutive interpreting service; therefore the consecutive interpreter was relatively at ease performing the interpreting task. Relatively slow delivery of speeches is believed to reduce cognitive pressure on listening and production, thus the ability of the interpreter to keep large segments of speech in their short-term memory before they can be integrated into target speech sentences.

7.2 Accent:

Han & Riazi, M. (2017) believe that strong accents are perceived as a stressor factor that could produce detrimental effects on the quality of interpretation and to the task of interpreting as it may increase the processing capacity requirements. During this press conference, the accents and pronunciation of the speakers were not posing any challenges to the interpreter as the two speakers spoke at a slower pace avoiding repetition, hesitation, and redundancy.

7.3 Speech length:

Political leaders are prone to vary their speech length according to the importance of the topic being discussed. Obama's speech ranged from lengthy segments to short ones while the Emir of Kuwait stuck to short sentences while opting for a lower voice. The two speakers greatly segmented their speech chunks in a helpful way allowing the interpreter to take notes, reformulate and render the interpretation in due course.

8. Tactics:

8.1 Comprehension tactics

8.1.1 Reconstructing the segment with the help of the context:

Losing track of segments of the speech due to cognitive load or lack of comprehension may also be detrimental to the whole task. In such a case, Gile (2009) thinks that the interpreter may have to resort to useful tactics as a way of maintaining the context of the speech by reconstructing the previous segments of speech in their mind using their background knowledge, mastery of the two languages, the subject, and the situation (their extralinguistic knowledge). The process of reconstruction may also entail some auto-corrections before reformulating the message in the target language. However, the interpreter in this instance should pay more attention to their processing capacity as reformulation can be time-consuming and may subsequently lead to cognitive saturation.

8.2 Reformulation tactics:

8.2.1 Explaining or paraphrasing

Interpreters may sometimes misunderstand a word or fail to come up with the appropriate equivalent of terminology in the target language, in which case they can resort to paraphrasing in one's own terms or explaining it rather than translating it.

This tactic in Gile's view can be efficient whenever the interpreter skillfully utilizes it while simultaneously keeping a close watch on the time and processing capacity it requires to render the interpretation accurately.

8.2.2 Omitting the content of a speech segment:

Instances of omissions were numerous in the press conference. Some of them were due to missed chunks of speech or as a way of avoiding saturation and cognitive load. However, in political events and formal settings, this may be considered a blunder that undermines the interpreter's credibility.

The instance of omission committed was when the interpreter failed to notice a missing segment in the source discourse or deliberately omitted and this can be said to be a negative omission that may be attributed to insufficient processing capacity available for the listening and analysis effort when the speech segment carrying it was being uttered.

Unimportant segments of speech can be omitted without undermining the normal course of interpretation and of context by using the strategy of positive omission as the best option. Riccardi (2005) considers it an emergency strategy, provided that the omission is not repeated, and the goal of this strategy is to skip less important information in order to gain information of importance, in order to avoid cognitive overload and for efficient partitioning of working memory resources.

Gile (2009) believes that omission can also be opted for in case of speech that may seriously undermine the bilateral relationships between the countries or cause major harm to the speaker's interests as well as the intents and objectives of the meeting.

8.2.3 Parallel' reformulation:

This tactic is slightly similar to the paraphrasing tactic as it enables the interpreter to continue speaking despite comprehension and reformulation deficiencies. We may define this tactic as an innovative tool whereby the interpreter comes

up with a speech segment that is compatible with the rest of the speaker's words. The invented segment should be used carefully and exceptionally especially in cases where the content of the source speech is far less important.

8.2.4 Chunking:

Chunks are the parts that make up the verbal input of speech, which usually consists of a sequence of several words that the interpreter works to reformulate into understandable translation units. (Pochhacker 2012)

The method of slicing the input is controlled by several factors, including delivering mode, the subject, delivery rate, and degree of difficulty. Pockhacker (2012) considers it as a decision-making strategy, as it can be a support for memory as well and to achieve effective communication and synchronization between speech inputs and outputs.

In consecutive interpretation, the segmentation tactic proves beneficial in the reformulation phase as it helps the interpreter recall the logical links between information segments written in their notes by reformulating them one after the other, with the hope that they can render a logic interpretation that serves the speech context and intents as they speak. (Gile, 2009)

9. Preventive tactics

9.1 Note-taking:

Pockhacker (2012) argues that the notes taken by consecutive interpreters is considered a complex cognitive process that can amount to a special skill used as a preventive strategy in consecutive interpreting since memorizing all information in such a limited and tense atmosphere would be a hard task

especially when it comes to figures and enumerations. Note-taking is also believed to be used to maintain and memorize necessary information only. (Chao Han¹ , Mehdi Riazi², 2017)

10 Discussion:

Challenges affecting the quality of interpretation in consecutive interpretation can be rife. Formality is one factor that may influence the interpreter's performance considering the degree and seriousness of topics discussed. The impact of political settings on the quality of interpretation is undeniably concrete. Interpreting in political settings can cause cognitive saturation to the interpreter that may result in bloopers and unexpected mistakes. Language specificity aspects can also influence the natural conveying of the message considering the degree of similarity and dissimilarity between the linguistic combinations. Moreover, the speaker factor including, accent, delivery rate, speech length, etc, are unavoidable aspects in interpretation for one can't expect all speakers could have the same accent, pronunciation, and tone. Therefore, it is quintessential for interpreters to learn more about the "accent" and pronunciation habits of speakers to which they interpret.

Many of the problems mentioned in the analysis of interpretations are recurrent. In order to deal with them, some tactics were invented on the spot as interpreters must always be on the lookout for any problem that may arise. The consecutive interpreter ability in this research did not live up to expectations prompting the researcher to include some widely used tactics by professional interpreters be it grammatical, cognitive, or speaker related.

Conclusion:

This study examined factors influencing the quality of consecutive interpretation in political settings by using an observation method. The data was collected by comparing the source discourse and the interpretations while applying Gile's taxonomy of challenges that may arise during the consecutive interpretation process derived from his cognitive effort model.

Cognitive saturation, language specificity problems, and the speaker factor are the three main factors that can be detrimental to the quality of consecutive interpretation especially when on duty in political or diplomatic settings. Therefore, consecutive interpreters need to make enough preparation for such formal events, develop ways of handling instances of cognitive saturation, and provide further training on listening to speakers' accents, pronunciation, and tone. Having said that, Resorting to coping tactics as a way of performing crisis management in formal situations should go in line with a type of political event the audience, and the speakers.

This study, supposedly, will broaden the research of consecutive interpretation in terms of challenges and further tactics and strategies. In addition, this study will enrich the knowledge on the quality of consecutive interpretations in different situations and will offer myriad practical suggestions to novice interpreters and learners alike.

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