PROBLEMS AND STRATEGIES IN CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETINGS

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ABSTRACT

This article is a contribution to the study of strategic competence in interpreting. After a brief overview of the main contributions dealing with the concept of strategies and problems in interpreting, the article presents a pilot study which analyses the interpreting problems encountered by two groups of students at two different stages of training and the strategiesthey apply. It details and classifies the strategies used to resolve the difficulties and assesses the students' perceotion as to whether and how they have succesfully completed the task. A number of commonalities and differences between the two groups have been observed. In the conclusions, it is stated that the more we learn about how the processes involved in interpreting are acquired and developed, the more successful we shall be in establishing a basis on which to design training parameters that address the strategic competence and the reflective practice.

Keywords: consecutive interpreting, interpreting strategy, interpreting problem, pilot study, retrospective questionnaire

Consecutive interpreting entails a large number of almost concurrent cognitive, psychomotor and affective processes, all of which pose major challenges for the interpreter who has to deal with them simultaneously. The interpreteris constantly confronted with unexpected situations that must be dealt with while he/she is already working at the limits of his/her available processing capacity (Gile 1995). It is therefore crucial that interpreter training should be as effective as possible and that during their training period, future professional interpreters should develop a series of strategies or tactics that can be used to solve the problems encountered. Gile (1995; 2009) describes a series of tactics and strategies interpreters apply when problems in the interpreting process arise. He establishes a distinction between the terms tactics and strategies. According to this author, strategies are planned actions with specific objectives and tactics refer to online decisions and actions taken by the interpreter during the execution of the task to overcome the difficulties encountered. He restricts the use of these two terms to deliberate decisions aimed at preventing or solving problems. In the present study, we prefer to use the term strategy to refer to both immediate and longer-term actions taken to solve a problem. At

the same time, as we shall see in the results of the study, and bearing in mind that our analysis is based on a retrospective reflection by the students after having completed a task, it is impossible to determine whether the strategies adopted by the students when faced with an interpreting problem are conscious and deliberate, or whether they are unconscious, spontaneous actions and reactions in response to a difficulty.

The concept of strategy was first introduced in the field of translation by Hönig and Kussmaul (1982), who defined translation strategies as processes which lead to an optimum solution to a translation problem. Hurtado (1999: 246) defines translation strategies as the individual procedures, both conscious and unconscious, verbal and non-verbal, used by the translator to solve the problems encountered in the course of the translation process, depending on the specific requirements involved.

Regarding the problems, according to Nord (1988: 151), these are objective difficulties that all translators need to resolve during a given task, regardless of their level of competence and formal working conditions. Riccardi (1998) states that simultaneous interpreting can be considered a problem-solving activity. The difficulty arises from the original speech, while the solution occurs in the interpreted speech, and the strategies consist in the mechanisms and decisions that take place between the problem and its solution.

Returning to the concept of strategy, Hurtado (2001: 277) states that translation strategies may be linguistic, extralinguistic, instrumental or pragmatic. Attempts have been made to analyse translation strategies by means of experiments. The main methodological approach used has been think-aloud protocols, that is, where the translator (or translation student) expresses his/her mental processes while translat- ing. Some noteworthy studies along these lines include those by Lörscher (1991) and Kiraly (1995). In other cases software such as Camtasia and Proxy were used. They allow the translation process to be recorded and to view the steps taken by the trans- lator, namely, corrections, consulting document sources and modifications. On the other hand, the software Translog (Jakobsen 2011), in addition to recording the translation process, also provides time statistics, pauses by the translator, behaviour, etc. Thus it is possible to obtain data in a more natural setting. Finally, not to be forgotten are the eye-tracking systems, which record eye movements of the translator across the screen.

Lörscher (1991: 125) considers a translation strategy to be a conscious and individual process used to solve a translation problem. Therefore, translation strategies are individual; they entail an element of planning, pursue certain objectives and are associated with a series of actions taken in the pursuit of achieving those objectives. He organizes strategies into three global strategies:

-propose preliminary solutions to problems (explore);

-literally repeat source or target text segments that have already been captured or

verbalised (control);

-recoup segments and reformulate them (paraphrase).

He also underlines the wide variety of strategies used. In other words, different strategies are used by different subjects to deal with the same problem. However, he only considers translation problems of a lexical, syntactic or lexico-syntactic nature. The study by Kiraly (1995) presents a series of translation process indicators, including dictionary query strategies, the use of mnemonic devices, retranslations, etc. However, there are drawbacks to both Lörscher (1991) and Kiraly's (1995) studies regarding their general assertions about translation strategies. Lörscher's study focuses on foreign language students and consequently deals with pedagogical trans- lation rather than professional translation, extrapolating from students engaged in pedagogical translations to professionals who carry out communicative translation.Kiraly studies a group of nine translators and nine translation students, which is a rather small sample.

As shown by the studies reviewed, analysing the strategic component in inter- preting is considered to be a fundamental source of relevant data for teaching. Abuín (2007) provides an exhaustive review of the most prominent strategy-related studies in the field of interpreting, which we shall now briefly consider.

CONCLUSION

This study shows a number of trends in the strategic actions taken by the students, depending on the level of training. Summarising the main results:

-Novice students report more problems than the advanced students;

-The problems that crop up tend to be different in kind, depending on the level of training;

-Regarding the students' perceptions concerning their ability to solve interpreting problems, advanced students show a greater sense of failure to satisfactorily resolve the task;

-There are some commonalities among all the students when tackling certain prob- lems;

-Novice students tend to report a greater use of strategies than the advanced students;

-Advanced students draw on a wider range of strategies.

These results merit consideration in further studies, as we may hypothesise that a greater understanding of the problem-strategy relationship at different levels of interpreter training could have a direct impact on the development of methods and materials contributing to improvements in the teaching of consecutive interpreting. Likewise, the fact that advanced students have a wider range of strategies at their disposal, which allow them to deal with a greater number of problems compared to novice students, suggests the importance of integrating into the firsts stages of the interpreting training the practice of identifying and consciously reflecting on inter- preting problems, as well as investigating their causes. This practice can be expressly

introduced by the teacher during training with a view to providing the students with resources which will enable them to self-regulate their interpreting performance and raise their awareness of the most challenging aspects of the process.

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