Strategic Decisions re
How to Use the Text
in Simultaneous Interpreting

Based on

Simultaneous Interpretation with Text
Is the Text 'Friend' or 'Foe'?
Laying Foundations for a Teaching Module

Seminar paper by

Catherine Davies, Rawdha Cammoun, Konstantin Ivanov, and Boris Naimushin

Aims and objectives of the study

Our observational research paper is devoted to **Simultaneous Interpretation with Text (SI+T),** a mode of interpreting which is becoming increasingly common in international meetings.

It studies the attitudes of practicing conference interpreters and their teachers with regard to:

(1) **strategies used by interpreters in dealing with text in SI**, and
(2) cognitive constraints and benefits of SI+T,

Special attention is paid to possible variations of these attitudes depending on the moment at which interpreters receive the text. This research is restricted to the use of 'running text' speeches and presentations and distinguishes between four moments (scenarios) at which the interpreter receives the text:

(1) long before (hours, days, weeks) - the 'ideal' situation;
(2) shortly before (15 to 30 minutes) - the 'normal' situation, which usually or often happens;
(3) just before (less than 15 minutes) - the 'rush' situation; and
(4) after the speaker has begun - the 'crisis' situation, i.e. the worst case scenario to be avoided if at all possible.

Results of the Literature Review

Our literature review has revealed that, in the scarce and often contradictory existing academic studies on SI+T, there is an overall tendency to stress the difficulties and cognitive constraints of the process, with very little literature, if any, on the benefits of having a text in SI. **There is also little material about the strategies used by interpreters when confronted with the need to perform SI+T.**

Strategic Decision on whether or not to use the Text in SI

The overwhelming majority of our respondents said that they used the text either "always" or "sometimes". In other words, whether trained in SI+T or not and irrespective of their length of experience in working with the text, interpreters use it in one way or another. This result stands in direct contradiction to the claim that has become commonplace in academic writings and professional discussions among colleagues that, because of the inherent difficulties of SI+T, many interpreters do not use the text.

Even in the fourth scenario, the majority of the respondents indicated that they do choose to use the text in one way or another, even when the text is provided after the speaker has already started delivering the speech. **This proves our hypothesis that the text is useful in all circumstances, even in a 'crisis' situation.**

Strategic Decisions relating to the Preparation of the Text in SI

In the **first scenario**, the three most important elements focused upon by the surveyed interpreters when preparing the text are, in descending order:

> (1) complex syntax;
> (2) idiomatic expressions; and
> (3) sayings, proverbs and quotations.

In the **second scenario**, interpreters look at

> (1) the main idea,
> (2) complex syntax and
> (3) idiomatic expressions, with
> (4) sayings, proverbs and quotations following them closely behind.

In the **third scenario**, interpreters

(1) circle/highlight/underline some key elements,

(2) skim through the text to grasp the whole picture and the main idea, e.g. positive/supportive vs. negative/critical, and

(3) look at the opening and closing paragraphs.

Additional comments received from respondents

In terms of SI+T strategies**, virtually all the authors of these comments always consider having a text as a help**, except sometimes in the following three situations:

(1) when the text is read out at top speed;

(2) when the speaker digresses from the written text;

(3) when the text is provided after the speaker has begun (our fourth scenario).

In these three situations, most respondents tend to push the text aside. This fact would tend to corroborate our observations based on other survey questions. The strategic decision on whether or not to use the text also depends on the nature of the text (political vs. technical).

2.0. Main General Conclusion

One major general conclusion which may be drawn from this study is that, although the written text of a speech can create a distraction and cause certain cognitive constraints, there are also certain strategies, depending on the specific circumstances or scenario, which may be learnt, practised and applied, in order to integrate the written text into the interpreting process. The text may then be considered as a tool useful for enhancing output performance in SI+T. This main conclusion could be presented as a slogan:

"IN SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETATION, THE TEXT IS ALWAYS A FRIEND!"