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SELF-SELECTION AT THE CANDIDATE LEVEL OF SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETING

Received March 3, 2015; Revised April, 2, 2015; Accepted May, 3, 2015

Abstract. This article aims at outlining the role of self-selection in the decision by the potential students of simultaneous interpreting, i.e. interpreter candidates, to apply for a university programme in simultaneous interpreting. The role of self-selection is investigated by means of a psycholinguistic experiment involving the potential students' written reflections on the topic 'Why I Chose to Apply for a University Programme in Simultaneous Interpreting'. The experiment is conducted with six interpreter candidates (further referred to as 'participants') who want to apply for university translation and interpreting programmes at Stockholm University (Sweden), Brussels Free University (Belgium) and University of Seville (Spain) respectively. The study's specific objective is to identify main categories involved in the participants' self-selection of the university programme in simultaneous interpreting. The participants are instructed to write a 500 words essay on the topic 'Why I Chose to Apply for a University Programme in Simultaneous Interpreting'. The corpus of the participants' essays is subsequently tagged in computer program CLAN in order to facilitate the identification of the self-selection categories. Data analysis reveals that the most frequent categories involved in self-selection are 'Interest', 'Communication with other people', 'Another identity', 'Novelty' and 'Interpreting as a natural choice' respectively.

Keywords: simultaneous interpreting, self-selection, psycholinguistics, interpreter candidates, application for a university course in simultaneous interpreting.

Капранов Олександр. Роль самостійного вибору потенційних студентів курсу з синхронного перекладу

Анотація. Стаття описує роль самостійного вибору потенційних студентів курсу зі синхронного перекладу. Роль самостійного вибору досліджується за допомогою експерименту, в якому потенційні студенти курсу з синхронного перекладу пишуть твір на тему «Чому я вирішив/вирішила вивчати курс з синхронного перекладу». Експеримент проводився з шістьма кандидатами (надалі «учасниками»), які подали заявки на курси усного перекладу до Стокгольмського університету (Швеція), Брюссельського Вільного університету (Бельгія) й Університету Севільї (Іспанія). Конкретна мета дослідження полягає у визначенні основних категорій, присутніх у самостійному виборі курсу з синхронного перекладу. Корпус есе учасників експерименту опрацьовано в комп'ютерній програмі CLAN з метою ідентифікації категорій самостійного вибору. Аналіз даних показує, що категорії, які беруть участь у процесі самостійного вибору курсу з синхронного перекладу, є «Інтерес», «Спілкування з іншими людьми», «Інша ідентичність», «Новизна» та «Переклад як природній вибір» тощо.

Ключові слова: синхронний переклад, самостійний вибір, психолінгвістика, майбутні перекладачі-синхроністи, вибір курсу з синхронного перекладу

Капранов Александр. Роль самостоятельного выбора потенциальных студентов курса синхронного перевода

Аннотация. Эта статья описывает роль самостоятельного выбора потенциальных студентов курса по синхронному переводу. Роль самостоятельного выбора исследуется с

помощью психолінгвістического эксперимента, в котором потенциальные студенты курса по синхронному переводу пишут сочинение на тему «Почему я решил/решила выбрать курс по синхронному переводу». Эксперимент проводился с шестью участниками, которые подали заявки на курсы по синхронному переводу в Стокгольмском университете (Швеция), Брюссельском Свободном университете (Бельгия) и Университете Севильи (Испания). Корпус эссе участников впоследствии был обработан в компьютерной программе CLAN в целях идентификации категорий самостоятельного выбора. Анализ данных показывает, что категории, участвующие в процессе самостоятельного выбора курса по синхронному переводу, являются «Интерес», «Общение с другими людьми», «Другая идентичность», «Новизна» и «Перевод как естественный выбор» соответственно.

Ключевые слова: синхронный перевод, самостоятельный выбор, психолінгвістика, будущие переводчики-синхронисты, выбор курса по синхронному переводу.

Introduction

Simultaneous interpreting is a complex bilingual meaning-oriented verbal task involving concomitant activities of listening, analysing, comprehending, translating, editing and reproducing in real time under externally controlled input in the source language. The simultaneity of comprehension in the source language and speech production in the target language is considered a salient characteristic of simultaneous interpreting (Kapranov et al. 2008). The complexity of simultaneous interpreting has been among the research foci of psycholinguistics starting from seminal work of Goldman-Eisler (1972) and her colleagues (Barik 1975). From the vantage point of psycholinguistics, research topics in simultaneous interpreting typically involve attention-sharing, concurrent activation of the two languages, attention allocation, on-line chunking of the input, temporary storage and meaning extraction of large chunks of the input language, verbal fluency, monitoring while listening, coordination of listening, memory and speech production, access to new input while reformulating (Albl-Mikasa 2013; Giles 1999; Ivars & Calatayud 2013; Kurz 2003; Moser-Mercer 2000). Building upon a cornucopia of previous research in psycholinguistic aspects of simultaneous interpreting (House 2013; Seeber 2013), the present article seeks to outline the problem of self-selection in choosing the course in interpreting, i.e. why a potential student of interpreting chooses to apply for a university programme in simultaneous interpreting. Meta-analysis of literature in the field of interpreting and translation studies indicates that self-selection is an underresearched area (Takeda 2010). In contrast with translation and interpreting studies, there is abundant literature in psychology and psycholinguistics involving the concept of self-selection (see Kapranov 2014 for a meta-analysis of self-selection in these two scientific fields). Whilst self-selection is often referred to as 'noise' (Bellman & Varan 2012), an insight into the process of self-selection of the interpreter candidates can contribute to identifying an extra variable in the complex process of skills acquisition by a simultaneous interpreter. Hence, the main focus of this article is to identify categories involved in the process of self-selection of a university course in interpreting and translation studies by potential interpreter candidates. Following the view of simultaneous interpretation as a dynamic phenomenon (de Bot 2000; Kapranov et al. 2008; Kapranov 2009), self-selection in the present article is regarded as one of the variables comprising a complex and dynamic space of skills and abilities of a simultaneous interpreter. The complexity

involves not only various skills, but also affective and attitudinal factors, such as self-efficacy, self-awareness, self-confidence, self-concept and self-selection amongst a plethora of other possible variables (Bolaños-Medina 2014:198).

The abilities and skills interpreter candidates should possess are well-documented (Kapranov & Vik-Tuovinen 2008; Macnamara et al. 2011; Seeber 2013; Shlesinger & Pöchhacker 2011). Previous research is indicative of two mutually exclusive claims in relation to the interpreters' skills and cognitive abilities: First, it is suggested that skills required for the complex task of simultaneous interpretation are innate (Macintosh 1999). Second, the aforementioned assumption is contested by interpreter training schools and researchers indicating that intensive interpreter training leads to the special skills development (Russo 2011). However, recent publications are suggestive of an important variable relevant to aspiring interpreters, namely the assumption that there are gifted and ungifted interpreter candidates (Rosiers et al. 2011). Factoring this argument in, admission into interpreter training programmes presupposes aptitude testing for interpreter candidates. In this regard, interpreter candidates' aptitude tests with predictive power involve testing their lexical knowledge, working memory capacity, verbal fluency and other variables (Shlesinger & Pöchhacker 2011; Timarová & Salaets 2011). However, interpreter candidates' aptitude testing does not seem to factor in self-selection as well as other personal reasons involved in choosing the profession of a simultaneous interpreter.

To reiterate, currently there are insufficient empirical data involving the role of self-selection on the interpreter candidate level. The present article describes a psycholinguistic experiment which aims at investigating self-selection of the university course in simultaneous interpreting by interpreter candidates. Self-selection is identified in a corpus of reflective essays titled '*Why I Chose to Apply for a University Programme in Simultaneous Interpreting*' written by six interpreter candidates (further referred to as *participants*).

Hypothesis. The hypothesis was based upon an assumption that written reflections on the topic '*Why I Chose to Apply for a University Programme in Simultaneous Interpreting*' would yield categories involved in the participants' self-selection of the university course in simultaneous interpreting. Additionally, it was assumed that the essay's word limit of 500 words would stipulate the participants' reflections on the most salient categories involved in self-selection.

Methods

Participants. Six participants (one male and five females, M age = 21.5) in total were tested in the study. The participants' first languages (L1) were Swedish (two participants), Spanish (two participants) and two participants identified themselves as early balanced French/Dutch bilinguals. All the participants expressed their desire to apply for the respective Translation and Interpreting programmes at the universities of their choice. However, none of the participants made a formal application at the time of the experiment. Two Swedish L1 participants indicated that they considered applying for the Translation and Interpreting programme to Stockholm University, Sweden. Two early balanced French/Dutch bilinguals

indicated that they would apply for the Translation and Interpreting programme to Brussels Free University, Belgium. Two participants whose L1 was Spanish informed that they were considering their application to the University of Seville in Spain for the Translation and Interpreting programme there. All the participants identified English as their foreign language. The participants indicated that English would be one of the working languages at their respective interpreter training programmes. The participants' real names were coded to ensure confidentiality.

Procedure. The participants were recruited in 2014 at Stockholm University (the participants from Belgium and Spain were exchange students who studied for a semester in Sweden, two other participants were local students from Stockholm, Sweden). First, the participants read the Information Sheet with detailed explanations of the experiment. Second, the participants signed a Consent Form allowing the experimenter to gather their written data for scientific purposes. Third, the participants were instructed to reflect on the topic '*Why I Chose to Apply for a University Programme in Simultaneous Interpreting*' individually without any consultations with each other, other people and/or sources in or outside of university. Then, the participants were asked to write a 500 words essay in English on the topic '*Why I Chose to Become a Simultaneous Interpreter*' and send it to the experimenter electronically via e-mail. The participants were given one week for the execution of the task. All the participants completed the task which was subsequently analysed for the purposes of the present study.

The present experiment was based upon research methodology outlined in psychology and educational psychology (Kenrick et al. 2003; Pike 2011; Pulkka & Niemivirta 2013; Ryan et al. 1998) which involved data mining of written self-reflection testimonials produced by the participants.

Data analysis. Data analysis procedure in the experiment involved a computer-assisted analysis in computer program CLAN (a detailed account of the analysis procedure was provided in Kapranov (2012)). The participants' essays were tagged in CLAN to facilitate the identification of categories involved in the participants' self-selection of a university programme in simultaneous interpreting.

Results

Data analysis in CLAN yielded statistics presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Categories involved in self-selection

Category involved in self-selection	Number of occurrences per group
Interest'	6
Communication with other people'	5
Interpreting as a natural choice'	2
Another identity'	1
Novelty'	1

Discussion

As assumed in the hypothesis, the participants' written reflections on the topic *'Why I Chose to Apply for a University Programme in Simultaneous Interpreting'* have yielded several categories involved in the self-selection process of the university course in simultaneous interpreting. These categories are 'Interest', 'Communication with other people', 'Interpreting as a natural choice', 'Novelty' and 'Another identity' respectively. Concurring with Takeda (2010), it can be assumed that the categories involved in self-selection may offer an opportunity for interpreter trainers and interpreter schools alike to reflect on their teaching practices and teaching methodology and to facilitate a student-oriented approach to teaching simultaneous interpreting.

All the participants mention 'Interest' in their decision to apply for a university course in simultaneous interpreting. It should be noted that this category is concurrent with other categories, for instance 'Communication with other people' which is referred to by five participants. An example of the combination of several categories is provided in excerpt 1 below:

(1) *I would say that to become an interpreter is actually interesting. It would be exciting to meet new people and to be able to get to know new topics, new words and new expressions.* (Female Spanish L1 participant)

In (1), 'Interest' is mentioned together with 'Communication with other people' and 'Novelty' respectively. 'Novelty' is a one-off category, not referred to by other five participants. It should be emphasised that the combinations of categories vary among the individual participants, as seen from Figure 1:

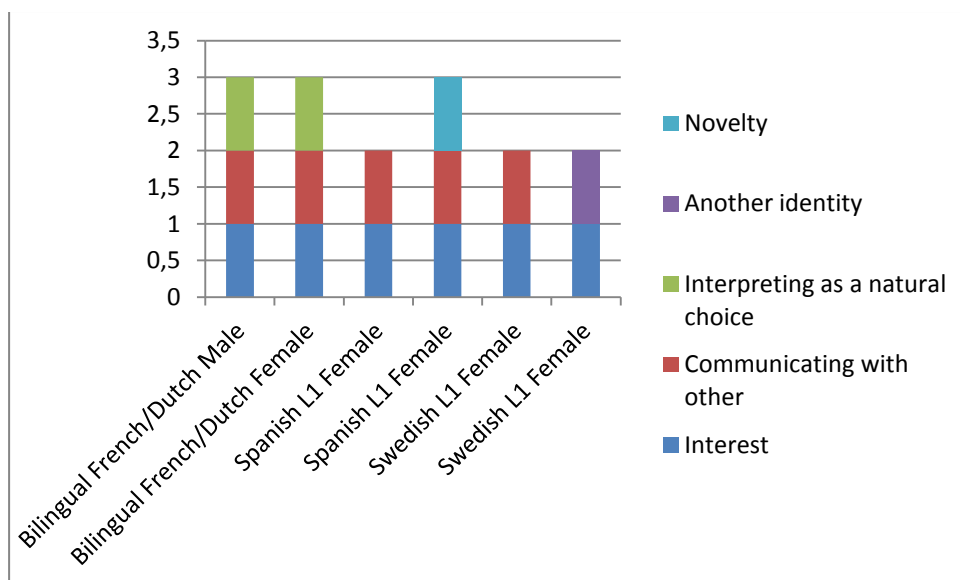


Fig. 1. *Self-selection categories by individual participants*

'Interest' is closely followed by the category 'Communication with other people' which is identified in five essays. Presumably, these two categories are indicative of the participants' proclivity to engage in the 'sender-receiver' mode of communication, i.e. when communication involves people other than the individual

SELF (in contrast with autocommunication with the SELF alone). ‘Communication with other people’ in conjunction with ‘Interest’ suggest an element of extraversion involved in self-selection. However, despite a high number of occurrences of the aforementioned category, extraversion does not seem to be the only variable involved in the self-selection of the career path of an interpreter. Interestingly, two bilingual participants from Brussels Free University (Belgium) mention the category ‘Interpreting as a natural choice’. Whilst ‘Communication with other people’ and ‘Interest’ respectively have been mentioned by the bilingual Belgian participants, the category ‘Interpreting as a natural choice’ contributes an additional layer of complexity to the participants’ self-selection process. Specifically, both the bilingual participants from Belgium indicate in their essays that knowing two languages and code-switching at ease respectively induce the selection of the course interpreting as a natural choice, as evident from excerpt 2:

(2) *I live in Brussels, the capital of Belgium, where a lot of people speak both French and Flemish, a dialect of the Dutch language. I come from a Flemish-speaking family, but I spoke mainly French at secondary school and now at university my subjects, apart from English (my major), are in French. To be able to communicate both in Flemish and French has never been a problem to me. When I applied for the admission to the interpreter program at my home university, it just appeared to be very natural to use my skills as a bilingual to become an interpreter one day.* (Male early balanced French/Dutch bilingual)

Excerpt 2 is evocative of previous research findings which suggest that interpreting from one language into another is a natural and by-default process in early balanced bilinguals who, presumably, can perform interpretation at no significant cognitive cost (Malakoff 1992). Bilingual language proficiency is thought of as a critical variable, which defines the task of interpreting. A superior level of bilingualism is deemed to be a prerequisite for the interpreting activity (Gile 1999). That is why bilinguals are considered to constitute a pool of potential candidates for intensive training programmes in interpreting and translation (Moser-Mercer 2000). Obviously, the present findings serve only as a self-perceived indication of the on the part of the bilingual who subjectively refers to the ease and naturalness of the task of simultaneous interpretation.

Another variable involved in self-selection of the career of an interpreter has been mentioned by female Swedish L1 participant who writes that

(3) *Knowing English well and living my life with the English language in Sweden comes from bullying in high school, when I chose to communicate in English to get away from constant bullying. English gave me another identity, if you like. I think that my personal interest in interpreting comes from an idea of me being another person, an English woman, just someone else.* (Female Swedish L1 participant)

Even though the category ‘Another identity’ occurs only once in the present data, it opens an interesting avenue for further experiments aimed at elucidating whether or not the interpreter’s second language (L2) is associated with another identity, different from that represented by the interpreter’s L1.

It should be observed that none of the participants mentions the category ‘Money’ or ‘Salary’ in their respective essays. This findings is in contrast with previous research (Dam & Zethsen 2013; Zwischenberger 2009) which indicates that remuneration for the highly demanding profession of a simultaneous interpreter is considered an important variable by professional interpreters. Similarly, none of the participants refers to such categories as ‘Fame’ or ‘Prestige’, which have been reported to be associated with the professional simultaneous interpreters (Dam & Zethsen 2013:247).

Conclusions

The present article outlined the role of self-selection in the interpreter candidates’ decision to choose their career of a simultaneous interpreter. Self-selection was investigated by means of a psycholinguistic experiment involving six interpreter candidates who provided written reflections on the topic ‘*Why I Chose to Apply for a University Programme in Simultaneous Interpreting*’. The corpus of the participants’ essays was tagged in computer program CLAN in order to facilitate the identification of the self-selection categories involved in the participants’ decision to apply for admission to a university course in simultaneous interpreting. Data analysis revealed the following categories involved in the participants’ self-selection, namely ‘Interest’, ‘Communication with other people’, ‘Interpreting as a natural choice’, ‘Novelty’ and ‘Another identity’ respectively. Those findings might open new avenues of research in the process of self-selection of the career of a simultaneous interpreter.

Acknowledgements

I want to acknowledge six participants who took part in the study. Their participation is highly appreciated. I want to acknowledge a research grant from the University of Bergen (Norway) which enabled me to write up this article.

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