

# **Psychological stress and simultaneous interpreting: The effect of the speed of delivery**

Paweł Korpala

Faculty of English, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań  
pkorpala@wa.amu.edu.pl

Conference interpreting is commonly believed to be one of the most cognitively demanding language tasks (Gile 1995; Christoffels and de Groot 2005; Seeber 2011). Simultaneous interpreting (SI) involves processes and skills such as: self-monitoring, memory skills, verbal fluency and concurrent listening and production. Since interpreting requires mastering numerous skills, several researchers touched upon the question of interpreters' aptitude in the context of interpreter training (e.g. Moser-Mercer 1985, 1994; Lambert 1991; Mackintosh 1999; Chabasse 2009). Linguistic and cognitive abilities were often treated by interpreter trainers as predictors of interpreters' future success. However, in recent years, one might observe that psycho-affective factors in conference interpreting are gaining more and more attention of the interpreting scholars and interpreting schools admitting new candidates (e.g. Timarová and Ungeod-Thomas 2008; Rosiers et al. 2011; Bontempo and Napier 2011).

The present research focuses on psychological stress experienced by conference interpreters. Although conference interpreting is often referred to as a stress-provoking activity, empirical research on interpreters' stress still transpires to be quite scarce. Moser-Mercer et al (1998) showed that prolonged turns in simultaneous interpreting caused stress among interpreters and negatively influenced the quality of interpretation. Kurz (2003) compared the level of physiological stress during an interpreting task between novices and professionals by measuring pulse rate. Kao and Craigie (2013) manifested that the majority of interpreting trainees experience stress while interpreting.

The main objective of the project is to examine whether the speed of speaker's delivery influences the level of psychological stress experienced by professional interpreters and interpreting trainees during (as well as before/after) a simultaneous interpreting task. *Psychological stress* is to be understood as a subjective notion, influenced by personality traits and the perception of a task to be performed (Monat and Lazarus 1977). Apart from a psychometric instrument (STAI - *State-Trait Anxiety Inventory*) the measurement of the level of stress in the experimental condition has been supplemented in my project by using a physiological measure (pulse rate) and a stress indicator in language production (disfluencies). The participants were asked to interpret simultaneously two parallel 10-minute speeches differentiated only by the speed of delivery. In the course of the analysis I examined whether the higher speed of delivery had an impact on (1) the psychological stress level and (2) the quality of interpreting output in both experimental groups. As this is an ongoing project, during the presentation I will present only some preliminary results for the group of interpreting trainees which seem to manifest that interpreting should be regarded as a particularly stressful activity. The project is crucial from the didactic point of view as it suggests that interpreter trainers should be aware of the psychological aspects of interpreting

practice and be able to help students come up with appropriate solutions which, in turn, may boost the quality of interpretation.

(462 words)

### **References:**

- Bontempo, K. and J. Napier. 2011. "Evaluating emotional stability as a predictor of interpreter competence and aptitude for interpreting", *Interpreting* 13, 85-105.
- Chabasse, C. 2009. *Gibt es eine Begabung für das Simultandolmetschen?: Erstellung eines Dolmetscheignungstests mit Schwerpunkt Simultandolmetschen*. Berlin: SAXA Verlag.
- Christoffels, I. and A. de Groot. 2005. "Simultaneous interpreting: A cognitive perspective", in: Judith F. Kroll and Annette de Groot (eds.), *Handbook of bilingualism: Psycholinguistic approaches*. New York: Oxford University Press, 454-479.
- Gile, D. 1995. *Basic concepts and models for interpreting and translation training*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Kao, P. C. and P. Craigie. 2013. "Evaluating student interpreters' stress and coping strategies", *Social Behavior and Personality* 41 (6), 1035-1044.
- Kurz, I. 2003. "Physiological stress during simultaneous interpreting: A comparison of experts and novices", *The Interpreters' Newsletter* 12: 51-67.
- Lambert, S. 1991. "Aptitude testing for simultaneous interpretation at the University of Ottawa", *Meta* 36 (4), 586-594.
- Mackintosh, J. 1999. "Interpreters are made not born", *Interpreting* 4 (1), 67-80.
- Monat, A and R. Lazarus. 1977. *Stress and coping: An anthology*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Moser-Mercer, B. 1985. "Screening potential interpreters", *Meta* 30 (1), 97-100.
- Moser-Mercer, B. 1994. "Aptitude testing for conference interpreting: Why, when and how", in: Sylvie Lambert and Barbara Moser-Mercer (eds.), *Bridging the gap: Empirical research in simultaneous interpretation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 57-68.
- Moser-Mercer, B., A. Künzli and M. Korac. 1998. "Prolonged turns in interpreting: Effects on quality, physiological and psychological stress (pilot study)", *Interpreting* 3:1, 47-64.
- Rosiers, A., J. Eyckmans and D. Bauwens. 2011. "A story of attitudes and aptitudes? Investigating individual difference variables within the context of interpreting", *Interpreting* 13:1, 53-69.
- Seeber, K. 2011. "Cognitive load in simultaneous interpreting: Existing theories – new models", *Interpreting* 13: 2, 176-204.
- Timarová, S. and H. Ungeod-Thomas. 2008. "Admission testing for interpreting courses", *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer* 2 (1), 29-46.