

Simultaneous interpreters converge emotionally with the speaker during the process of interpreting

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Though previous research has repeatedly pointed to a decreased sensitivity to emotionally-laden linguistic materials presented in the non-native (L2) relative to the native (L1) tongue, studies conducted thus far have rarely focused on whether and to what extent simultaneous interpreters are affected by negatively-valenced stimuli when interpreting in the L1-L2 and L2-L1 direction (Pavlenko 2005; Caldwell-Harris 2014; Jankowiak & Korpala 2018; Korpala & Jasielska 2019). The present pilot study employed skin conductance (SC) as an indicator of emotions experienced while professional Polish (L1) – English (L2) interpreters (N = 5) interpreted negatively-valenced and neutral (a control condition) sentences presented orally in the two interpreting directions. Both Polish and English sentences were pretested in a normative study and then recorded by a native speaker of Polish (sentences in Polish) and a native speaker of English (sentences in English). The results showed that experimental (negatively-valenced) sentences elicited an increased SC compared to the control condition, $p = .008$. However, there was no statistically significant effect of interpreting direction ($p > .05$), and thus the interpreters' emotional response to affect-laden materials was observed in both L2-L1 and L1-L2 interpreting directions. The observed results indicate that participants were affected by the valence of the presented stimuli to the point that they might have converged emotionally with the speaker. In this way, the results are in line with previous research on empathy and emotional contagion observed in simultaneous interpreting of affect-laden content (Korpala & Jasielska 2019). Consequently, it seems that not only do professional interpreters invest a considerable effort in performing a linguistically and cognitively complex task of interpreting, but they are also emotionally engaged when processing affect-laden stimuli. Additionally, a similar pattern of results observed in the two interpreting directions suggests that emotional responding in interpreting as an inter-lingual process is modulated by output production in the target language. The observed results may provide insight into the question of emotional language processing in interpreting.

References:

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