TÍTULO: Evaluación de la calidad de la interpretación simultánea.

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RESUMEN: La calidad de la capacitación en interpretación se puede aumentar notablemente al establecer criterios claros de evaluación y estándares de desempeño que los maestros deben seguir y los estudiantes deben cumplir. Los teóricos, así como los intérpretes experimentados, cuestionan constantemente los estándares exactos para evaluar la calidad del desempeño del intérprete. Según algunos de ellos, hay características cuantitativas que eventualmente pueden convertirse en criterios cualitativos. El estudio analiza varios modelos existentes a este respecto, así como la propuesta original del autor basada en los hallazgos en neurociencia cognitiva.

PALABRAS CLAVES: Interpretación simultánea, calidad, evaluación, criterios, perspectiva.

TITLE: Simultaneous Interpretation Quality Assessment**.**

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ABSTRACT: The quality of interpretation training can be notably raised through setting clear evaluation criteria and achievement standards which teachers must follow and students must meet. Theoreticians, as well as experienced interpreters, are constantly questioning the exact standards for assessing the quality of interpreter´s performance. According to some of them, there are quantitative features that can eventually be converted into qualitative criteria. The study discusses several existing models in this regard, as well as the author's original proposal based on findings in cognitive neuroscience.

INTRODUCTION.

In every professional field, the quality standards and assessment tools make it possible to evaluate and compare outcomes or implied processes for which they have been developed. From the educational and didactic point of view, the evaluation criteria enable to align inputs and processes to achieve desired outcomes.

Theoretical researchers, as well as active interpreters, are constantly questioning exact standards for assessment of the quality of interpreter´s performance. Surprisingly, they agree in a paradoxical view that there are no uniform standards and criteria that interpreters should adhere to. Moreover, there is also no reliable scientific method for assessing the quality of interpreter´s performance – especially in the case of simultaneous interpretation. "*We seem to know what the product [ST] should be like, but we are less sure about a method for establishing what a particular product is like in a given situation. Quite obviously, researchers, teachers and trainees need to have a method for looking at a product*" (Pöchhacker, 1994:235).

The International Association of Conference Interpreters described the quality of conference interpreting as "*that elusive something which everyone recognises, but no one can successfully define*" (AIIC, 1982: 1).

Likewise, the style of simultaneous interpretation is a vague concept that addressees of interpreter´s performance perceive, but they cannot verbalize it. Usually, they are only able to evaluate globally whether a particular interpreter´s performance has met their expectations or not. However, as far as clear criteria or (discerning) the importance and quality of particular aspects of interpreter´s production are concerned, their views differ substantially. Moreover, their ideas about what a good interpreter´s performance should look like diverge, too.

DEVELOPMENT.

Overall guidelines.

In general, when evaluating the quality of interpretation, we can either 1) consider the target text as an integrated whole, or we can, by means of a scale, 2) evaluate its singular linguistic (or extralinguistic) components as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, stylistics or factual correctness of the interpreted information as follows:

Grammar. The accuracy of the grammar applied can range from appropriate use of grammatical tenses, genders and pronouns, correct use of prepositions and sentence connectors, to grammatical errors that significantly distort the meaning of the source text (using a 5-point or a 10-point scale in descending order).

Vocabulary. The lexicon of the interpreter´s production may oscillate between variety of speech similar to a native speaker´s production, i. e. corresponding to five or seven thousand words ("active vocabulary"), including the knowledge of professional terminology and correct use of synonyms on the one hand, and inappropriately utilized lexemes, poorly developed vocabulary, terminology gaps, and inability to verbalize the intended content on the other hand.

Pronunciation. The interpreter's manner of speaking can seem that of a native speaker (accent, tempo) marked by proper and distinct articulation, fluent and natural speech cadence; or there may be shortcomings in his/her verbal production (incorrect pronunciation, low volume) causing even misunderstanding and/or misinterpretation of the source text information (e. g. the interpreter takes pauses improperly during his/her speech). Exceptionally, an interpreter´s pronunciation may be even incomprehensible to the audience (e. g. in case of a strong foreign accent).

Factual correctness. This part of the evaluation process mainly concerns the quantitative measure in which the interpreter can preserve the extent and meaning of the information delivered. An outstanding performance usually does not contain compelling interpretation mistakes such as omissions, inadequate additions or substitutions, although the interpreter obviously cannot avoid less significant mistakes such as using an improper stylistic layer, choosing an inappropriate synonym, or causing unproductive shifts in meaning.

A fruitful fulfilment of the above-mentioned criterion decreases in proportion to the number of omissions, inaccurate formulations (approximations), and, of course, in proportion to the occurrence of unfinished sentences that are considered to be a distinct sign of the interpreter's failure.

Specific models and theories.

Among the first experimental researchers, 1986 Hildegund Bűhler and her colleagues in 1986 proposed a model of conference interpretation quality assessment from the interpreters´ perspective. (In comparison, later, in 1988, Ingrid Kurz concentrated on expectations of interpretation service users).

Originally, there were 16 criteria and the survey was conducted on members of AIIC. Linguistic factors included: consistency with original message, correct use of grammar, fluency of delivery, native accent, etc. Extralinguistic factors comprised: pleasant voice, preparation of documents, pleasant appearance and positive feedback of the delegates. In both experiments, the results confirmed

higher importance given to the linguistic-semantic criteria over the extra-linguistic ones (Kahane, 2000).

In this regard, Sylvia Kalina (1996) suggested a compromise: *"What is needed is a model encompassing the communication situation, the intentions and knowledge bases of different actors (including the interpreter), and any conditions liable to affect the interpreted event"* (Kalina, 2002: 124), i.e. she recommended to include in the assessment process all factors which influence interpreters´ output.

Kalina also proposed a framework of interpreting conditions to evaluate interpretation quality which includes: 1) pre-process phase, 2) a peri-process framework, 3) in-process requirements and 4) post-process activities: *"the more conditions are met in the relevant phases, the better interpreting quality should be"* (Kalina, 2005: 778).

The 1994 Interpretation Conference in Turku, which set out to develop uniform quality standards for the evaluation of interpreters´ performances (identical interpreted texts were considered), has encountered the primary obstacle (in the process of defining a high-quality interpreter´s performance) in the form of divergent views not only of the participating interpreters, but also of the recipients of specific interpretations, and the speakers themselves (Delisle, 1995: 200).

In the process of discovering objective methods for assessing the quality of interpreter´s performance Antonio Cartelli, he expressed the view that there are quantitative features that may eventually be transformed into qualitative criteria (2003: 12).

Franz Pöchhacker drew attention to the fact that "*In simultaneous interpreting, the text as such is […] a multi-parametric semiotic whole, which, in its full complexity often defies description*" (Pöchhacker, 1994: 236). Qualitative aspects of an interpreter´s output can be detected, analysed and evaluated at multiple levels – lexical, semantic, intertextual, pragmatic, or other.

As a result, Pöchhacker has proposed an "audiovisual" textual evaluation model, which focuses on: 1) multiple text parameters (vocabulary, grammar, phonetics – pronunciation), 2) paraverbal components (lapsus, pauses), and 3) non-verbal components (for example prosodic) (Ibidem, 1994: 239). These qualitative elements are consequently supplemented by quantitative aspects such as speech (diction, hesitation), speed and rhythm of interpreting, which may seem secondary from a professional´s point of view, but they are usually not in the case of recipients who just on the basis of these seemingly 'accessory' characteristics of an interpreter's output assess his or her professional competencies[1].

According to Wladimir Kutz, the analysis of interpreters´ performances can be done in a communication-pragmatic, psycholinguistic or text-semantic direction. In this sense, we evaluate: 1) preservation of the source text meaning in the target text, 2) language realization (interpreting techniques and/or purely linguistic aspects), and 3) presentation – an overall impression and action characteristics (Kutz 2000: 91).

Miriam Schlesinger and her research team have distinguished three main levels of analysis when assessing interpreter´s performance: a) intertextual (it compares the source and target texts on the basis of similarity and differences); b) intratextual (it includes acoustic, linguistic and logical aspects of the translation in the target language); c) instrumental level (it refers to the comprehensibility of the target text and its applicability to the recipient) (Garzone, 2002:108).

Taida Nováková – on grounds of many years of professional experience in the field and in line with Kutz's opinion – asserts that it is important to take into account different viewing angles when assessing the quality of interpretation. The first one is (1) evaluation on the part of the organizer of

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[1] **Franz Pöchhacker's new interpretation quality model presented in 2001 focuses on the relationship between participants in the 'communication situation with interpretation' and their different viewing angles, taking particular account of** *positions for subjective measurement* **and** *objective features of the textual product* **(Pöchhacker, 2001: 412).**

the interpreted event, who always wishes its smooth and undisturbed course. The second one is (2) perspective of the recipient of the target text, who has the relevant professional and factual knowledge, but he/she does not have the required language competencies. At the same time, (3) each interpreter has his/her own individual matrix of assessment that depends on his/her personal qualities and experience (self-reflection ability and the like). In conclusion, Nováková reports (4) perspective of evaluation on the part of colleague interpreters, especially during simultaneous interpretation in the relay and retour mode, because they are the first recipients of the interpreted text and subsequent senders of the text into target languages (Nováková, 2012: 88-89).

Daniel Gile defines interpretation quality as the resulting average value of various qualitative parameters of different weights including information reliability, correct use of the target language, voice quality, manner of speaking, and so on. Based on this, he suggests a mathematical formula expressing the quality of interpreter´s performance in this form: $Q = \Sigma\, w_i.c_i$, where c_i are the quality components and w_i their weight (Gile, 2003: 110).

According to Viera Makarová the quality of interpreter´s performance depends on whether shortcomings and imperfections have reached a subcritical or supercritical measure (Makarová, 2004: 46).

Lenelle Foster (2014) in her experimental project defines three interpreting areas to assess:

1) Content-message accuracy and cohesion: equivalent meaning is conveyed entirely; names, numbers, acronyms, abbreviations are conveyed accurately; ability to verbalise the message (not literally) is prominent; cultural knowledge is adequate.

2) Form: vocabulary, terminology and register (e.g. on developing speaking skills see Metruk, 2018a); grammar, phraseology and purity.

3) Interpreting skills: listening, analysis (on extensive listening training see Metruk, 2018b), concentration, problem solving, paraphrasing, presentation- fluency of delivery, voice quality, correct

use of equipment and professional interaction.

Foster also calls attention to the fact that there is a possible dissonance between declared (based on expectations) and actual (based on practice) quality criteria.

To conclude this part, we will exemplify at least one of the relatively often applied evaluation criteria – fluency of speech. A conference speaker and his audience who do not speak foreign language can mostly 'judge' interpreter´s performance only on the basis of external characteristics; listeners expect the interpreters to adhere as much as possible to the linguistic and communication structures used in the target language. In addition, they expect the fluency and clarity of speech, the rate of interpretation comparable to the speaker's delivery rate, and, according to the findings of quantitative researchers, they even assume that the interpreter will imitate the orator also in the manner of speaking.

It follows that the fluidity of interpreter´s performance can be examined by focusing on those elements of speech that contribute to the natural, contiguous and uninterrupted verbal production of the interpreter. This means that noticeable speech hesitations, unfinished sentences, late starts, or repeated silence will be (to the addressees) obvious indicators of low quality of the interpretation. (For example, an interpreter's output containing 31 pauses (searching for an appropriate lexeme or a phrase), 10 false starts (correction and rewording of a phrase), 13 hesitations (uncertainty), 12 unfinished phrases and 7 cases of late start (very long *decalage*) is logically less fluent than the output of another interpreter containing 19 pauses, 7 false starts, 6 hesitations, 4 unfinished sentences, and 4 cases of very long *decalage* (Yagi, 2000: 520-527).

Receiver´s perspective.

To assess the quality of an interpreter´s performance, we can also adopt the recipient´s perspective. Several research teams have focused (over the past decades) on distinctive features proper of the addressees which mainly influence their expectations in the matter of quality of an interpreter´s production. Among them we list the following factors:

a) **Age.** In his 1996 study, Peter Moser found that with advancing age of respondents, their demand for "translational accuracy" increases.

Franz Pöchhacker and Cornelia Zwischenberger[2] in their 2010 study stated that the "monotony" of the interpreter´s voice was the least disturbing factor to younger age groups, while earlier classes emphasized the need for 'voice liveliness' in the interpreter's production.

b) **Gender.** Female audiences usually tolerate shortcomings in the interpreter´s production better than male audiences (Pöchhacker – Zwischenberger, 2010).

c) **Previous experience with interpretation.** According to the research carried out by Robin Setton and Manuela Motta (2007: 217), the participants with different frequency of attendance at interpreted events attribute different importance to individual aspects of interpreters´ performances – the greater their personal experience with interpreting, the higher their demands for the quality and accuracy of the interpretation.

d) **Education of addressees.** This criterion must be considered on two levels: the general education of the recipients and their corresponding qualitative demands in terms of singular aspects of interpreter´s performance (including intonation qualities); on the other hand, particular professional knowledge (including terminology) concerning the specific field of interpretation. In this context we recall that the interpreter is only rarely acquainted with the particular professional sphere, what is often reflected in the quality of his work.

e) **Active language of the interpreter.** This is another possible criterion in the process of evaluation of interpreter´s performance. Despite high linguistic proficiency, the verbal production of interpreters for whom the target language is not the mother tongue is often perceived as a lower quality 'product'

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[2] **The research sample consisted of more than 700 conference interpreters aged between 30-87 with average work experience of 24 years. Among the evaluated aspects of the translation were: fluency in production, correct terminology, correct grammar, correspondence with the original, vivid intonation, native speaker´s accent, pleasant voice, synchronicity, style of speech and completeness of the translation.**

by the audience – generally just because of the absence of a language-specific accent.

In this regard, Jaroslav Stahl (2012: 118-120) found out in his research that the factors which the client, or eventually the organizer of an interpreted event considers to be essential (without a hierarchical arrangement) are:

1) Fluent speech of the interpreter.

2) Translating the text without grammatical errors.

3) Target text is logical.

4) Pleasant voice of the interpreter.

5) Equivalency between the source and target texts (if it can be verified) and 6) other factors.

Subsequently, the author adds that factor 3) has been rated as the most important quality factor. It was followed (in descending order of importance) by the fluency of speech, then by linguistic and logical correctness, and by calm manner of speaking of the interpreter (i. e. vocal qualities like native accent, tone, rate, pitch, fluency, intensity, articulation are analysed in Metruk, 2017 and in Metruk, 2019).

A cognitive proposal.

Based on knowledge from the field of cognitive sciences and taking into account our own interpreting and teaching experience, we propose to assess the quality of interpreting work through the lens of required cognitive functions and processes, i.e., desired interpreting competences which are consequently reflected in the quality of interpretation. Therefore, assuming the point of view of higher cognitive processes, we will appraise in interpreters following mental dispositions:

a) **Ability to hold attention** in the long term (in other words, the ability to concentrate on a task and to stay focused – to eliminate distracting factors and to resist fatigue).

b) **Ability to split attention** among several cognitive processes. This criterion concerns mainly simultaneous mode (of interpretation) when an interpreter must receive the original text in the source language, understand it, analyse it, hold the relevant information in short-term memory, transcode it

(in mind), verbalize it in the target language, and at the same time he/she is supposed to monitor his/her output in the target language. In other words, the ability to divide the attention actually means the competence to accomplish interpretation process as such.

c) **Memory ability** is related not only to the extent of stored information (in short or long term memory) and the speed of its retrieval, but also to effective use of the working memory.[3] From the lexical point of view, memory is also related to the extent of active or passive vocabulary.

d) **Rapid thinking** involves thinking processes such as analysis, synthesis, comparison, abstraction, concretisation, generalization, induction, deduction, analogy, generalization, specification, etc.

e) **Ability to speak quickly** (or *high rate of speech flow*) influences not only the length of ear-voice span, but to a great extent also the pace of interpretation.

f) **Cognitive flexibility** (or *problem solving*), i. e., the ability to deal with a translation problem on stylistic, syntactic or lexical level, e. g. when translating a lexeme for which there is no equivalent in the target language, or when interpreting an ambivalent (multivariate) or a vague expression; however, cognitive flexibility may also be understood as an ability to react promptly to unexpected extralinguistic factors (including paralinguistic ones, e. g. a speech disorder of the speaker; or metalinguistic ones – related to the personality of the speaker).

g) **Ability to mentalise**[4] means first and foremost a disposition to understand behaviour, or discourse of other people; and in a certain way an ability to predict (anticipate) it, in other words to 'read people´s intentions and motivations'. The *theory of mind* (another term for *mentalisation*) can be utilized by the interpreter:

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[3] **In the context of simultaneous interpreting, the use of *working memory* means that the interpreter does not just elaborate mentally the momentaneously delivered speech segments, but he/she must continually take into account the context – the semantic area to which the interpreted discourse is related, as well as the communication situation, i. e. the time-space circumstances in which the interpretation is carried out. It is equally important to keep in mind the interrelationships among various components of the text (cohesion and coherence) within the discourse of a single speaker, and/or taking into account the previous and subsequent orators' speeches.**
[4] **Mentalisation (or mentalising) is mainly possible thanks to mirror neurons which enable to understand the expressions of another person (especially paraverbal and non-verbal ones).**

– In the process of receiving source text as semantically and linguistically compact whole.

– When translating ambivalent expressions (or jokes).

– When trying to preserve the tone of orator´s speech (reproducing emotionally marked elements of his/her speech with the help of intonation and particular diction).

– When rendering metalinguistic meanings (hesitations, persuasiveness of the speech, but also the speaker´s intention – to promote, to convince, to challenge the audience, etc.).

– When applying the interpretation technique called *anticipation*.

CONCLUSIONS.

In each educational process the quality standards and assessment tools help ensure the effectiveness of learning and adequate acquisition of intended skills and knowledge.

The quality assessment in (simultaneous) interpretation depends always **on the perspective adopted** (e. g. the viewpoint of a recipient of the target text, of the service requester, of other interpreters, etc.), as well as **on the specific circumstances** of interpreter´s work: type of interpreted event (scientific conference, public assembly, literary meeting), type of orator (his/her personality, particular manner of speaking, speech tempo, speech impediment, etc.), difficulty of the source text (including linguistic, paralinguistic, metalinguistic and pragmalinguistic aspects), expectations of the audience (general theme vs. professional vocabulary, monotony versus variability in the interpreter´s verbal production), prior experience of the interpretation addressee with the work of an interpreter, and so on.

Although, the general principle assumes that the text in the target language should resemble as much as possible to the source text in the source language – in terms of both its content and its form – it is clear that based on the type of interpreted event or text, the interpreter will always focus more on some of its characteristic aspects, i. e., during diplomatic negotiations he/she will pay attention even to the slightest detail; when interpreting at a scientific conference his/her priority will be factual exactness; in case of a political speech he/she will emphasize the

rhetorical aspect of the source text; and when interpreting at literary meetings he/she will primarily focus on the (aesthetic) speaking style.

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