Synopsis

Interpreting is not merely about language as some people believe. It is actually about communicating information among people. The success of interpreting depends on so many things other than language. The current thesis aims at defining effective communication in interpreting so as to ensure the success of the activity.

The author first examines the nature of interpreting from the perspective of communication. Communication is a process in which a message sender shares information with a message receiver. When the Sender and Receiver are from different cultures, their communication is intercultural communication (IC). Barriers to IC often occur because the Sender and Receiver are not familiar with each other's language and culture. To facilitate communication, an intermediary, i.e. the interpreter, is added. Interpreting takes place. Thus we can appreciate that interpreting is one act of IC.

The communication model of interpreting is focused on in the next chapter. Daniel Gile (1995) defines two acts of communication in his model. The message encoded in the Source Language (SL) sent by the SL speaker is first received by the interpreter who, after decoding it, encodes the same message in the Target Language (TL) and sends it to the TL receiver. In the decoding phase (from the Speaker to the Interpreter), the interpreter's listening has been identified in light of the types of human listening. The focus of the whole interpreting process—the message—has been analyzed. Comprehension of the message consists of three elements: KL (knowledge of language), ELK (extra-linguistic knowledge), and A (analysis). The interpreter decodes the message and gets the meaning which is stored in his memory for the final goal of interpreting—encoding the same message in the TL. Reformulation is a receiver-oriented creation. For presentation, voice projection and packaging of the information have to be considered. However, as shown in Gile's model, without the Client, professional interpreting may never take place.

In interpreting, the interpreter is a special element. He is first of all a communicator who communicates with both the Speaker and the Listener. Culture and communication are acquired simultaneously and neither can exist without the other. To achieve all three levels of communication, namely the object level, communicative level and the interaction level, the interpreter plays the role of a cultural mediator who bridges the gap across culture. The interpreter is also a server since professional interpreting is a service to be provided to people. The interpreter serves the different parties in the communication, i.e. the Speaker, the Listener, and the Client. To serve well, he abides by professional codes of conduct.

As to interpret is to serve communication interests, the perception of quality depends

on the viewpoint of each participant in communication. To carry out his work effectively, the interpreter needs both competence and skills. The author suggests ways to build up the interpreter's competence in three areas: communication, language and culture. Ways of improving practical skills in both communication and interpreting have been presented. And lastly, the interpreter needs a high standard of professionalism to do his job well.

KEY WORDS
Communication
Interpreting

Contents

Introduction

In this age of information, no one can fail to realize the increasingly vital role communication is playing in our lives. As one of the largest recipients of foreign direct investment, China is in great need of qualified interpreters who can really serve as a bridge and facilitate communication across language and culture barriers instead of being merely a translation machine. However, being able to interpret is a lot different from being able to work with a computer. From her own interpreting experience and observing other interpreters, the author has found out that many unsatisfactory results or even breakdowns in interpreting situations can be attributed to the interpreter's failure to assume a communicator's role, not to his lack of language competence. Interpreting is rather a people-oriented than a technique-oriented activity. Therefore language skills are far from enough to make a good interpreter.

The current thesis is an attempt to define a more practical role of the interpreter, aiming at realizing effective communication in interpreting. It consists of four chapters excluding introduction and conclusion.

In Chapter one, the author tries to identify the nature of interpreting. To interpret is to communicate. Some basic concepts of human communication, including the definition, the communication process and the seven basic elements in the process have been examined. There are different types of communication. Interpreting is one act of intercultural communication (IC) as the communicators are from different cultures. The model of IC is provided to serve as a framework to look at the communication model of interpreting. When an intermediary is added in an IC situation, interpreting takes place. In the communication model of interpreting, the interpreter receives the message sent by the Sender. He goes through decoding and encoding phases so as to send the message to the Receiver. Though functioning as both a sender and receiver, the interpreter is neither of them.

Chapter two focuses on Gile's (1995) communication model of interpreting which includes two communicative acts and has taken into account the role of the Client. In the first phase of the model, i.e. from Speaker to Interpreter, the decoding phase, the author analyzes the interpreter's listening in contrast to that of an ordinary listener. The interpreter listens for the message, which consists of both verbal and nonverbal content. Comprehension of the message requires both KL (knowledge of language) and ELK (extra-linguistic knowledge) which are two complementary components of comprehension. Adequate analysis is also necessary to ensure the totality of comprehension. In order to store information for the later reproduction, the interpreter's memory plays an important part. The relationship between meaning and memory has been discussed to show how memory works better. The second phase of the model, i.e. from Interpreter to Listener, the encoding stage, is actually a

receiver-oriented creative activity. Presentation is the final realization of the whole process. It involves voice projection (volume, rate, fluency, pitch, quality of voice) and packaging of the information. Lastly, the often neglected role of the Client is explored.

Chapter three concentrates on the role the interpreter plays in communication. The interpreter is first of all a communicator. But he is more than just a normal communicator. The models and the decoding and encoding processes of monolingual and bilingual communication are provided to illustrate the differences between an interpreter and a monolingual communicator. The interpreter is also in a special position as a listener and speaker. He listens for a message that is not intended for him. He speaks out ideas which are heard from the original Speaker, not his own. So the interpreter assumes a "ghost" role. Though his best position in communication is to remain "invisible", he is an important cultural mediator. To achieve all three levels in communication, namely the object level, the communicative level and the personal/or interaction level, especially the interaction level, cultural awareness of the interpreter plays an important part. The interpreter is also a server in the communication, since professional translation is a service to be provided to other people. The interpreter serves the Speaker, the Listener and also the Client who initiates the activity and pays the interpreter. To serve well, the interpreter abides by the professional codes of conduct and bears in mind his responsibilities toward the Speaker, the Listener, the Client, the Language, his Colleagues, Himself, and the Interpreting Profession as a whole.

In chapter four, the author attempts to give suggestions on how to achieve effective communication in interpreting. Communication is effective when the Receiver (R) fully understands the message the Sender (S) is trying to send, i.e. S/R=1. Interpreting is successful when the aim of each participant (the Speaker, the Listener, the Client) is achieved. In order to satisfy all parties in the communication, the interpreter needs to have competence to do his job well, the competence in communication, culture and language. Some special personality traits are assets to a good interpreter, e.g. stress tolerance, resilience, learning curves and psychological competence. In addition to competence, the interpreter needs to possess some skills to guarantee his performance, his skills in listening, public speaking and his skills in interpreting. Some coping tactics have been suggested which are helpful especially in simultaneous interpreting situations. Last, some light has been thrown upon the professionalism of the interpreter.

Chapter One The Communicative Nature of Interpreting

1. A Look at Human Communication

1.1 What is Communication?

Every day we spend more than 70% of our time communicating: talking, listening, writing, reading, or thinking. We communicate with ourselves, with our families and friends, even with our enemies, verbally or nonverbally, in an oral form or in a written form, face-to-face or indirect. Communication plays such an important role in all of our lives that we cannot imagine the world without communication.

However, if we were asked to define "communication", we may find it difficult, though this word has been such a familiar concept, and intuitively we feel we understand it. Throughout the history of communication studies, "there have been numerous attempts to define communication." (Dance, 1970) But interestingly enough, never has a single definition been agreed upon by communication theoreticians. The reason is that, there are so many different approaches taken to the study of communication. Communication is

"the transmission of information, ideas, emotions, skills, etc., by the use of symbols—words, pictures, figures graphs, etc." (Berelson & Steiner, 1964)

"the eliciting of a response through verbal symbols." (Dance, 1967)

"a process of creating a meaning between two or more people." (Tubbs & Moss 1991)

"the stimulation of meaning through the exchange of shared symbols." (Infante, Rance & Womack. 1990)

In this thesis, the author attempts to define communication as a process in which a message sender shares information with a message receiver. It is a dynamic, ever-changing and unending process which involves 7 basic elements and will be examined in the following section.

1.2 Basic elements of the communication process

The communication process is a system that involves an interrelated, interdependent group of elements working together as a whole to achieve a desired outcome or goal. For a visual representation of the communication process
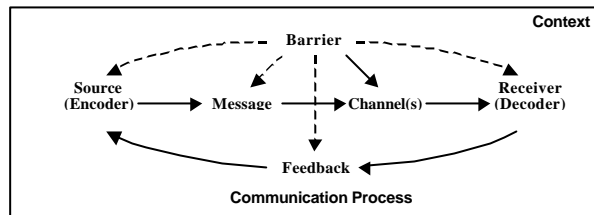
see figure 1.1 (Larry L. Barker[1])

Figure 1.1

From figure 1.1 we can see there are 7 elements in the process of communication: 1) a source/encoder of communication, which sends 2) a message 3) through a channel(s) to 4) a receiver/decoder, which 5) responds via feedback with 6) barriers which may result in communication breakdowns in each stage of communication. However, none of these elements is meaningful outside of 7) a situation or context in which it may be interpreted.

To have a better understanding of the nature of the process, we'll look at each of these elements and analyze how they affect one another.

1) **The source**, or encoder, makes the decision to communicate. He also determines what the purpose of the message will be: to inform, to persuade, or to entertain. He must encode, namely put the information he wants to convey into a form that can be sent to the receiver, or decoder, thus creating a message. The source generates a message through his past experiences, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings.

2) **A message** is the stimulus which the source or encoder transmits to the receiver or the decoder. It may be verbal, or nonverbal, intentional or unintentional. Most messages, as a matter of fact, contain two or more types of stimuli and they often overlap. So there are intentional verbal messages, unintentional verbal messages, intentional nonverbal messages and unintentional nonverbal messages. Most of the communicative stimuli we are conscious of fall within the category of intentional verbal messages, which are the conscious attempts we make to communicate with others through speech. To increase the likelihood of successful communication, the source must try to encode his message in a way that the receiver understands, so that the receiver can properly decode (interpret) the message.

3) Messages are communicated by means of **channels** (pathways or devices). If you are talking on the telephone, the channels that transmit the communicative stimuli are the telephone wires. The channels of face-to-face communication are the sensory organs. We rely almost exclusively on 3 senses: hearing, sight, and touch. Whatever channels of communication are used, the source must learn to

---

[1] Larry L. Barker   *Communication*   5th ed. Prentice Hall Englewood Cliffs. New Jersey P10

adapt the message to make use of the most appropriate channels available for the situation.

4) The person who attends to the source's message is **the receiver**. The receiver decodes messages based on past experiences, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. He first has a physiological reception of stimuli by using his ears or eyes. Then he pays attention to both the verbal and nonverbal stimuli and reduces all the stimuli bombarding us to one or two we can cope with more easily. Next, he tries to understand the stimuli and interpret them into messages. Finally he stores this information for later use so that next time he will be able to respond to the stimuli more quickly. Actually, all of us are both encoders and decoders. We are capable of both transmitting and receiving messages.

5) When we receive a message, we interpret it and then encode a response. The process of returning a message back is called **feedback**. Feedback tells the source how the receiver has interpreted each message. There are 3 kinds of feedback: negative feedback that conveys lack of understanding; positive feedback that indicates understanding; and ambiguous feedback, not clearly positive or negative. A good communicator is always sensitive to feedback and constantly modifies his message according to the feedback he receives.

6) Similar to radio transmissions where distortion can occur at any point along the circuit (channel), **barriers** to communication may occur when
    a) the source's information is insufficient or unclear;
    b) the message is ineffectively or inaccurately encoded;
    c) the wrong channel of communication is used;
    d) when the sender and receiver are not on the same "wavelength"—not having shared experiences. This is why two people from completely different cultures may find it difficult, if not impossible, to communicate.

7) The concept of **context** or situation is very important since it affects each of the other elements as well as the communication process as a whole. Without the context supplied, a message may be completely misunderstood by the receiver. Though communication is often thought of as an interaction between 2 people, communication transactions actually include: intrapersonal; interpersonal; small group; public; organizational; and mass transactions.

1.3 Types of Communication

Depending on the perspectives, communication can be divided into different categories: verbal vs. nonverbal; direct vs. indirect; directed vs. nondirected; intentional vs.unintentional; formal vs. informal; active vs. passive; simultaneous vs. nonsimultaneous; intracultural (within the same culture) vs. intercultural etc.

2. Interpreting as Intercultural Communication

2.1 Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication (IC) is the study of communication between individuals or groups of people from different cultures or from different subcultures (for example the Tibetans in China) of the same socio-cultural system (Gudykunst1987). Barna and Jain (Kitao, 1985:10) first linked the origin of IC instruction to the publication of *The Silent Language* by an American cultural anthropologist Edward Hall. The creation of the Peace Corp by JF Kennedy in the early 1960s also led to an increased interest in the field of IC and need for knowledge about how people of different cultures can communicate. In the last few decades, tremendous changes have taken place in the international environment. More firms are doing business outside their countries and becoming multinational. More people are travelling internationally on vacation as well as on business. Satellite communication has brought the world closer together. Our world has become a "global village" in which 'we know people and events in other countries almost as well as residents of small villages know their neighbours." (McLuhan, 1964) As a result, intercultural communication has become one of the most exciting, interesting and fastest-growing contexts of communication theory.

2.1.1 Intracultural Communication and Intercultural Communication

Intracultural communication refers to communication between people with a shared cultural background while intercultural communication occurs between people from different cultures. In typical intercultural communication, the communicators have completely different code systems as represented in figure 1.2 by two separate boxes. In a typical intracultural communication, the two boxes merge because the communicators share the same code system. See figure 1.3.
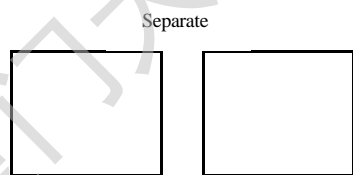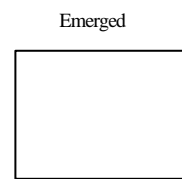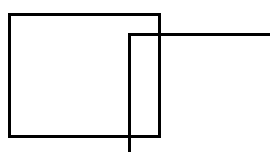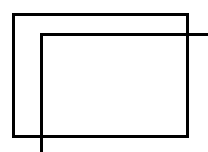

Typical Intercultural Communication   Typical Intracultural Communication

But in real-life situations, there are hardly any two persons who share exactly the same code system, neither any two who share nothing at all. So these two kinds of communication can be best illustrated as follows:

Intercultural Communication   Intracultural Communication

2.1.2 Intercultural Communication Model

In intercultural communication, as the two parties communicating are from different cultures therefore do not share a code system, the message is encoded by the sender in one code system and decoded by the receiver in another code system. See figure 1.6 for a representation of intercultural communication (IC) model.(: 1996:48)
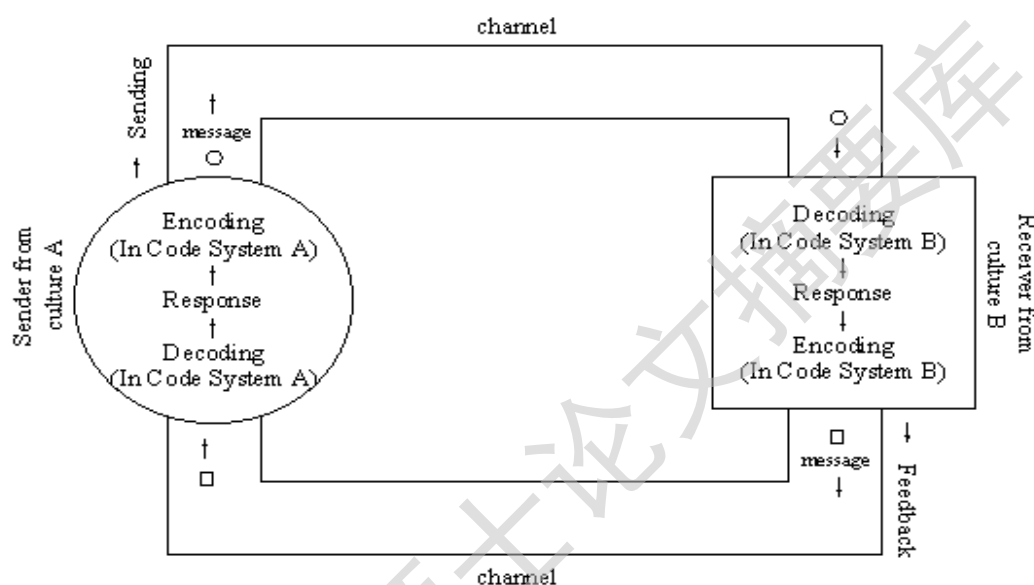

Figure 1.6 IC model

The sender's code system is represented by a circle while that of the receiver by a square. The sender encodes a message in code system A and sends the message (represented by a little circle o) through the channel. After receiving the message o, the receiver decodes it in his own code system, system B, and encodes a response which becomes a new message (represented by a little square □) and is sent to the original sender through the channel. The process goes on.

We should note that, as a member of a particular culture, a person learns particular patterns of perceiving the world through learning symbol systems such as language and nonverbal behavior. So throughout the process of intercultural communication, culture exerts influence, especially on the 3 most important elements: the sender, the receiver, and the encoded message.

Barriers to communication often occur because the sender and receiver are not familiar with each other's language and culture. The lack of overlapping fields of experience may result in breakdowns in communication.

To facilitate communication, someone who is familiar with both languages and cultures of the 2 communicating parties may be asked to help. Thus interpreting takes place.

2.2 Interpreting

2.2.1 What is interpreting?

Translating implies the rendering of information from one language into another so as to reproduce as accurately as possible all semantic and stylistic features in the Source Language (SL) in the Target Language (TL). Interpreting refers to the oral transition of an oral message.

2.2.2 Interpreting as Intercultural Communication

Professional translation, as we know, is aimed at a receiver (reader or listener) other than the translator (interpreter) himself, the receiver is essentially interested in the text, in whatever "message" it carries, and in the sender (author or speaker), not in the translator (interpreter) or the translation process. Therefore, professional translation is a professional act of communication. (Gile 1995).

As communication is the process of creating meaning between 2 or more people, through communication, we establish cooperation, acquire information, and establish interpersonal relationship to persuade, stimulate and entertain. In this sense, we can see that interpreting is an extreme type of human communication through which people from different cultures and speech communities transmit information, ideas, emotions, skills etc. By using different kinds of symbols, success of communication is ensured through the help of an interpreter who listens to a speech delivered in SL and then repeats the same speech in TL.

2.2.3 Communication Model of Interpreting

In interpreting situations, the message sender and the receiver communicate indirectly through the interpreter and the interpreter communicates both with the speaker and the listener. Here, the author illustrates the communication model of interpreting in Figure 1.7
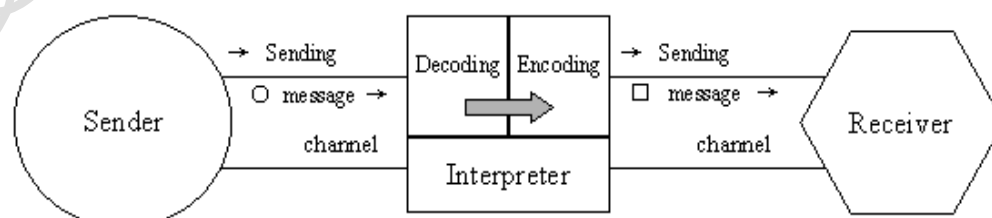

Figure1.7

From the figure, we can see that the sender sends message 1 which is encoded by

means of code A (represented by a little circle o) through the channel. The interpreter receives the message and recognizes code A. He goes through the comprehension phase in order to decode the message and get the content. Then the interpreter selects code B and encodes the equivalent of the content by means of code B which becomes message 2 (represented by a little square □) and sends the new message to the receiver.

There are some crucial points of difference between monolingual communication and bilingual communication involving interpreting. First, there are two signals, one sent by the sender and the other sent by the interpreter; secondly, there are two codes, code A and code B. And given the fact of impossibility of 100 percent equivalence, there are two sets of content, i.e. message o and message □.

The model of communication in interpreting will be dealt with in length in chapter two.

2.2.4 Interpreter as Intermediary in the Communication:

The form of face-to-face communication is adopted in consecutive interpreting settings. In this kind of communication, a special element, the interpreter, is physically present with both the speaker and the listener. All the participants communicate at the same place and at the same time, and can get direct feedback from the recipients. The interpreter's final aim is to ensure that the listener arrives at the speaker's meaning.

In the process of interpreting, the interpreter functions both as a speaker and a listener. He first works as a listener who listens to the speaker's message though the message is not directed to him. Then he functions as a speaker, though he is not giving his own opinion. In this sense the interpreter is not an ordinary speaker or listener. He is an important intermediary in the communication without whom the success of communication will not be possible.

From the sender's viewpoint, communication is successful if he manages to achieve the aim: that is in the case of non-literary interpretation, if receivers of the target-language text are successfully informed, understand the point, and /or have been persuaded. But this will not be possible without the help of the intermediary: the interpreter.

From the above analysis, we understand that interpreting in its nature is an act of intercultural communication and the interpreter is an intermediary in the communication who helps the sender and receiver realize smooth communication across the barriers of language and culture. Much more light will be thrown on the role of the interpreter in chapter three.

Summary

In this chapter, we looked at some basic concepts of human communication including the definition, the process and the seven basic elements with an aim of examining interpreting in the framework of communication. To understand interpreting as intercultural communication, we also analyzed the definition of intercultural communication (IC); the distinction between intercultural communication and intracultural communication and the IC model. Interpreting takes place when a special element, the interpreter, is added. So interpreting is one form of IC but has its own characteristics with the presence of the intermediary.

The next chapter will be focused on the communication model of interpreting so that we can have a clear idea of how communication takes place in interpreting.

Chapter Two: The Communication Model of Interpreting

In this chapter, we will examine the communication model of interpreting, so as to understand the mental process the interpreter goes through.

1 The Communication Model

1.1   The Basic Model

Seleskovitch proposes a basic model that consists of three elements: the (extemporaneous) *discourse* of the speaker which is often spontaneous and can't be prepared, the "*sense*" grasped by the interpreter, and its *reformulation* in the interpreter's native tongue[2]. "Sense" is said to be "conscious" and "non-verbal", "made up of the linguistic meaning aroused by speech sounds and of a cognitive addition to it that emerges together with that linguistic meaning" (Seleskovitch 1978: 336). During the interpreting process, the interpreter strips the input of its linguistic form to grasp the (deverbalized) sense or message, which is then expressed naturally in the target language.

The basic representation of the flow of communication in interpreting is often described in a single two-step model of communication:

$$Speaker \rightarrow Interpreter \rightarrow Listener \qquad \text{Figure 2.1}$$

In this model, the interpreter receives the message from the speaker in the Source Language (SL). After decoding and comprehending the message, he encodes the same message in the form that can be understood by the listener, i.e. in the Target Language (TL), and transmits the new message to the listener

However, the basic model does not take into account the fact that professional translation (including interpreting) is paid for by a client. Neither does it consider the not-so-rare case of a speaker speaking to both SL and TL listeners. This is why Daniel Gile's model is more comprehensive and complete. Next the author will examine Gile's Model.

1.2 Gile's Model

Gile (1995) adopts figure 2.2 to represent the configuration of communication acts in professional interpreting:

---

[1] Cay Dollerup and Anne Loodegaard (ed.) 1992 *Teaching Translation and Interpreting-training, talent and experience* John Benjamins Publishing Company Page 212