Original Paper

Self-assessment of Consecutive Interpreting by MTI Interpreting Students

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Abstract

Assessing the quality of interpreting practice and conducting targeted training is the key to improving interpreting ability of MTI student interpreters. By reviewing literature on interpreting assessment and self-assessment, the research has decided the parameters for self-assessment of consecutive interpreting practice, developed a self-assessment form and conducted self-assessment of MTI interpreting students for fifteen weeks. Research results show that students have developed awareness of autonomous quality monitoring and improved their overall interpreting ability.

Keywords

MTI interpreting, self-assessment parameters, self-assessment form, self-assessment practice

1. Introduction

It is clearly stipulated in *China's Guiding Educational Program for Master of Translation and Interpreting* that MTI interpreting teaching should stress interpreting practice and interpreting practice of no less than 400 tape-hours for students is required during their school years. This shows adequate interpreting practice is the prerequisite for the cultivation, improvement and automation of interpreting competence. However, assessing practice of such a big amount is rather tricky for teachers. On the one hand, there are not enough interpreting teachers since only two to four teachers are staffed for an interpreting class of around ten students. On the other hand, the staffed interpreting teachers still have tasks of teaching undergraduate students and doing research. But if students' practice is not timely guided or evaluated, it is difficult for them to find out their problems and make progress in interpreting. Although MTI interpreting students are not required to pass the CATTI (China Accreditation Test for Translators and Interpreters) Level 2, this exam is included in the MTI quality monitoring system for

teaching management by China National Committee for Translation and Interpreting Education. The pass rates of students in CATTI are important indicators of the universities' achievement in translation and interpreting education. The official pass rates of the CATTI in November 2019 shows pass rates of English Simultaneous Interpreting (one subject), English Simultaneous Interpreting, English Consecutive Interpreting Level 2 (one subject) and English Consecutive Interpreting Level 2 are 7.39%, 2.45%, 13.12% and 9.36% respectively. The official pass rates of CATTI in November 2020 are 3.36% for English Simultaneous Interpreting (one subject), 9.41% for English Simultaneous Interpreting, 8.63% for English Consecutive Interpreting Level 2 (one subject) and 9.70% for English Consecutive Interpreting Level 2 (Catti Center, 2021) (Note 1). With the popularity of CATTI attendance among MTI interpreting students, low pass rate not only shows the high difficulty and high demand of the exam, more importantly, it exposes the poor interpreting abilities of many MTI students.

If MTI students, who take major responsibility for their own learning process, are trained to assess their own interpreting practice, understand interpreting competence and assessment parameters better, they will be able take up some assessment tasks formerly borne by interpreting teachers and select adequate training materials, thus the problems of insufficient teachers and untargeted training are to some extent solved. Moreover, self-assessment enables students to see more clearly their problems and the right way forward. Appropriate and targeted training will help students achieve their learning goals, which may lead to the reduction of the anxiety and pressure caused by high-intensity interpreting practice, so that students' learning motivation can be maintained.

2. Current Researches on Self-Assessment of Interpreting Quality

Looking at the interpreting industry and related researches on interpreting quality, there are more researches on conference interpreting and simultaneous interpreting from the perspectives of researchers, customers and interpreting users, and the research on interpreters' self-assessment has received less attention. However, self-assessment of quality is a process by which learners self-evaluate the language skills and knowledge, which can improve learners' self-awareness and learning autonomy (Bulter & Lee, 2010). "In view of the particularity of the thinking process of interpreting, the differences in personal knowledge and cognition, self-assessment under the guidance of correct skill awareness is a very effective training promoter (Cai, 2007)". The research on self-assessment of interpreting quality is mainly divided into the self-assessment by interpreters and the self-assessment by interpreting students. The interpreter's self-assessment is a reflective and summative assessment, and there are few relevant documents at home and abroad. A search on CNKI (China National Knowledge index) for studies on interpreting self-assessment in the past ten years reveals that Lian Luo from Hunan University conducted an empirical study on the impact of self-assessment ability on interpreting quality in 2014. Luo found that the self-assessment ability of MTI interpreting students has advanced after eight weeks. Moreover, their memory has improved significantly, and the quality of students' interpreting has also developed (Luo, 2014). The parameters in the research are actually

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elements which constitute interpreting competence and interpreting errors are very broadly classified, students might find it hard to decide which category of error an error may fall into. Huan Li, through interviews and the experiment method, conducted a one-month self-assessment study on ten MTI interpreting students. A comparison between the experiment group and the control group shows that four students in the experiment group have improved their interpreting competence and reduced the frequency of similar mistakes (Li, 2015). However slight changes exist in the weight of parameters in the test before the experiment and that after the experiment, and the point deduction items under each parameter are also slightly different. In 2018, the *China Standards of English Language Ability (Self-Assessment Scale of Interpreting Competence)* was released, and it explicitly defines the corresponding interpreting competence of level 5 to level 9 (Ministry of Education of China & National Language Commission, 2018). In the same year, Man Luo from Shanghai International Studies University developed a self-assessment scale of requisite consecutive interpretation competence for interpreting students in China's universities by using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, specifically questionnaires and interviews. For the advanced level, there are 24 descriptions in the two aspects of analytical listening and target language production. For the elementary level, there are 37 descriptions in pre-interpreting preparation, analytical listening, target language production, the entire operational process and post-interpreting reflection (Luo, 2018). The *China Standards of English Language Ability (Self-Assessment Scale of Interpreting Competence)* and the aforementioned scale can help students know their level, but they still can't know what deficiencies they have. Sicheng Cao from Beijing Foreign Studies University proposed 21 self-assessment parameters for simultaneous interpreting based on the framework of content, target language delivery and communicative effects in the *China Standards of English Language Ability (Interpreting Scale)* and Bühler's criteria for assessing interpreting quality. The study shows that subjects are able to evaluate simultaneous interpreting competence and interpreting quality in a systematic way (Cao, 2019). However, the study is not diachronic, and it does not explore whether self-assessment is positively correlated with improvement of interpreting competence.

Therefore, the present study intends to conduct diachronic self-assessment of consecutive interpreting practice of MTI interpreting students, with the teacher designing the assessment tool and serving as assessment guide and the students themselves playing as judges. The research aims to help students locate their own shortcomings and deficiencies, improve their self-assessment ability and consecutive interpreting competence so as to inspire them to continuous self-assessment of interpreting quality and finally improving their interpreting competence.

3. Development of a Self-assessment Form for Consecutive Interpreting

3.1 Assessment Method

Assessment can be divided into summative and formative assessments. "The purposes and methods in different periods may differ, for there are a few factors that may exert influence such as the development of students' ability and course focus (Wang, 2017)". The summative assessment aims at distinguishing good students from the rest, rating grades, and determining whether they are qualified or not. The formative assessment intends to help teachers catch up with the progress of students' learning, obtain continuous teaching feedback, and then adjust teaching plans and improve teaching methods based on the feedback. Scoring can be divided into holistic scoring and analytical scoring. The former scores the overall competence of students according to certain standards, and there are problems with the interpretation of the scores, and it is difficult to locate the specific problems of the students. The latter scores competence from different dimensions, which helps students discover their own shortcomings and orient themselves towards future improvement. Assessment in interpreting teaching aims to understand the development of students' interpreting skills, diagnose and discover specific problems in students' interpreting training, provide feedback to students and teachers so as to promote interpreting training and teaching. Therefore, formative assessment based on analytical scoring better suits the present research.

Assessment in interpreting teaching includes qualitative assessment, quantitative assessment and a combination of the two. Chengshu Yang holds the view that "reliability and validity of qualitative and quantitative assessment show complementary effects of mutual confirmation. The figures represented by quantifiable indicators tend to represent more negative assessments and therefore need to be corrected by qualitative indicators. The results assessed by the qualitative indicators tend to be lenient because not all the details are reflected, so the quantitative indicators can be used to supplement the overall judgment…Quantitative assessment justifies itself as it makes full use of specific data" (Yang, 2005). Qualitative judgment requires many years' experience in interpreting teaching and interpreting practice, which students are short of. The addition and subtraction of data and the conversion of weights are more operable and easy for students to master. And the results are straightforward and highly pertinent. Therefore, the quantitative method supplemented by the qualitative method can be taken for the research.

3.2 Assessment Parameters

Xiaohong Cai considers assessment of interpreting quality to be "a measurement of the interpreting activity…The components of interpreting quality are very complex, and they include not only the quality of output, transmission of the target language, but also the feedback of the on-site audience and the resulting communicative effect. Furthermore, different purposes and methods of assessment will also change the proportion of each component (Cai, 2007)." It is almost impossible and unscientific to obtain comprehensive and accurate assessment of interpreting quality. The assessment should not be made rigidly uniform, for there exist differences in communication context, communication setting,

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communication mode and discourse structure in different interpreting tasks. Therefore, the assessment parameters of interpreting teaching should not only reflect the characteristics and requirements of interpreting, but also be adjusted according to the specific scenarios of students' interpreting practice, and be close to teaching and students' practice. The interpreting practice of MTI students is not real life interpreting, thus is with weak communicative attributes. Moreover, mental, physical and professional qualities are not obvious in students' interpreting practice. Therefore, the researchers believe that the product of MTI self-assessment is interpretation in teaching. What needs to be evaluated is students' interpreting competence rather than interpreter's competence, including language ability (bilingual ability and oral expression), knowledge (encyclopedic knowledge and professional knowledge) and interpreting skills (transformation skills and interpreting skills) (Wang, 2007).

The Scale of Typical Characteristics of Interpreting in the *China Standards of English Language Ability* is closely related to the quality assessment of interpreting products in interpreting teaching. Six level 3 parameters are set in the scale including accuracy, information completeness, fluency, appropriateness, logical coherence and communication effectiveness under three the level 2 parameters of expression, content and interaction. The present study is based on the results of relevant researches of interpreting assessment over the years, the components of interpreters' competence, the aforementioned scale framework and the characteristics of consecutive interpreting. The following indicators are extracted under each level 3 parameter: accuracy includes sense accuracy (misinterpreting is regarded as inaccurate), grammar, terminology, numbers as well as clear pronunciation. Information completeness means the absence of obvious omissions and absence of addition of information. Fluency refers to smooth delivery (numbers of pauses over two seconds and fillers like "en" and "ah" will be counted), back interpreting and speed. Appropriateness refers to register and style. Communication effectiveness means the interpreting should be easy to understand for the audience and the clients. Logic coherence requires coherence in meaning.

To avoid mistakes or to make as few mistakes as possible while interpreting is the basic requirement for a qualified interpreter. Hence, this study carried out self-assessment by counting the numbers of errors made during interpreting. In doing so, students didn't need to analyze and mark the source language in detail, so the process was relatively simple and the assessment was easy to operate. After the draft of the self-assessment form was finished, out-of-campus experts and fellows in the university were invited to review the form and give suggestions for improvement. The final revised form is represented below.

Table 1. Self-assessment Form of Consecutive Interpreting

Quality standard		Qualitative rectification	Number of errors (self-assessment)
Content	Accuracy	Sense accuracy	Equivalence is the standard.	
		Grammar		
		Terminology		
		Numbers	Approximate numbers are acceptable in case of complex numbers.	
		Clear pronunciation	Both British and American accents are acceptable.	
	Information completeness	Information omission		
		Information addition		
Expression	Fluency	Fluent delivery (pauses over two seconds and fillers like "en" and "ah".)	holistic assessment	
		Back interpreting		
		Speed	holistic assessment (too fast/moderate/too slow)	
	Appropriateness	Register	holistic assessment （not consistent/basically consistent/consistent）	
		Style	holistic assessment （not consistent/basically consistent/consistent）	
	Logic coherence	Meaning coherence	holistic assessment (not coherent/basically coherent/coherent)	

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Interaction	Communication effectiveness	Understandability	holistic assessment (ununderstandable/basically understandable /easily understandable)

How do you feel about the practice?

4. Interpreting Self-assessment

4.1 The Implementation of Interpreting Self-assessment

The self-assessment form was applied for the courses of E-C Consecutive Interpreting and C-E Consecutive Interpreting in China Three Gorges University and seven MTI interpreting students participated in these courses from March 2020 to June 2020. For each course, there were two periods in every week, 32 periods for the whole semester. The courses lasted for 16 weeks. But students attended the courses only for 15 weeks, for the final examination was held in the last week. Self-assessment was carried out every three weeks and five times of results were counted for each course. Interpreting tests were conducted before and after the self-assessment. The test materials of EC interpreting and those of CE interpreting were basically the same in style, structure, speed and length. The student score was the average of the sum of the scores given by the authors. Before the formal implementation of self-assessment, the training for students on assessment parameters, the weight of each parameter, qualitative rectification and other relevant assessment matters, supplemented by specific examples, were instructed in great detail. The teacher gave timely guidance to the students in the first self-assessment, and the students carried out the self-assessment independently. For the rest self-assessments, the teacher behaved as a helper to students when they were confronted with difficult problems. The courses were mainly instructed through the app Tencent Meeting because of the epidemic, and materials for self-assessment for the students were prepared by the teacher. There was one E-C and one C-E interpreting material each time. The students themselves played the materials and finish the self-assessment forms. Although this mode was less intense than on-site interpreting and lacked the training of how to deal with emergencies, it was more like students' independent after-class interpreting practice. After the self-assessment practice, students submitted their forms online, and the teacher would interview them on the scores.

4.2 The Results and Analysis of the Self-assessment

The study has found out that the students' ability in E-C and C-E interpreting has been greatly improved after the self-assessment. Students' scores in E-C and C-E interpreting before and after the self-assessment are shown in the table below.

Table 2. Interpreting Test Scores Given by Teachers

Student number	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7
Before	EC:45	EC:46	EC:50	EC:44	EC:55	EC:44	EC:40
self-assessment	CE:50	CE:49	CE:50	CE:45	CE:50	CE:48	CE:44
After	EC:73	EC:61	EC:67	EC:63	EC:70	EC:55	EC:68
self-assessment	CE:72	CE:65	CE:70	CE:66	CE:68	CE:62	CE:63

Because of the length restriction, the paper won't go into details regarding each indicator of students' self-assessment. Generally:

(1) The scores of students' self-assessment and teachers' assessment have been greatly raised. There is a sharp drop in the number of errors or problems for each indicator in the second assessment practice. Conversations with students find that before the self-assessment, students are less aware of quality and focus more on the aggregate of materials they have interpreted. However, after the first self-assessment, students' awareness of improving the quality awakens. And students' understanding of quality standards has deepened and they begin to independently monitor their production, thus boosting their motivation in interpreting training.'

(2) There is significant reduction in the numbers of "back interpreting" and "grammatical errors". In terms of the former one, because of the awareness of monitoring, once they notice their problems, they make remedies by adding information, explaining or activating other remedies. The seven students participating in this study have all passed TEM-8 (Test For English Majors, Band 8—the highest level) and are equipped with basic language skills. At the beginning of the study, the main grammatical errors in their interpretations often occur in tense, singular and plural forms, personal pronouns, etc. because the students have treated interpreting practice too casually. As the study progresses, the nervousness of test makes the students pay more attention to their language production and speed. According to the results of the self-assessment forms, grammatical errors have almost been eradicated. Although some of the more complex grammatical errors might have not been found out by students, the research proves that students have the ability to correct simple grammatical errors through self-assessment and begin to be responsible for the quality of language production in the target language.

(3) "Fluency" has tended to be "moderate" since the third self-assessment. The part of "how do you feel about the interpreting practice" shows that students have recognized the characteristics of their own language. As long as students are trying to monitor their interpreting, problems like slow speed, mispronunciation, frequent use of fillers can be solved gradually. "Information addition" mainly includes the addition of conjunctions, prepositions, articles and necessary polishing for the sake of complete sentences. Interviews with students indicate that students are making great efforts not to affect the accuracy and completeness of the information.

(4) As for "register", "style", "meaning coherence" and "understandability", students' scores are basically "basically consistent", "basically coherent" or "basically understandable". The reason may be that students are not able to evaluate these parameters, leading to their assessment being higher or lower than real level. Moreover, coherence and understandability are easily affected by accuracy and information completeness, which are difficult problems that students have yet to solve.

(5) The numbers of "misinterpreting" and "information omission" are in the tendency to decline. Although major sense errors are significantly reduced, small errors like the omission of examples in listing are still obviously seen. This is because firstly, analytical listening remains a prominent blocker, especially in E-C interpreting; secondly, individual skills such as note-taking and memory are not adequately internalized. In comprehensive training, an individual skill might take up too much processing capacity, thus affecting capacity allocation for other skills.

5. Shortcomings of the Research and Suggestions for Future Researches

Self-assessment of interpreting quality in consecutive interpreting can help students improve their interpreting competence and identify their shortcomings and the right way forward. Assessing the quality of interpreting in a scientific and comprehensive way is rather hard, therefore, the researchers adopt an assessment tool that is suitable only for the interpreting practice of MTI students. In doing so, the psychological quality and communicative effectiveness of interpreters are not addressed in the assessment, but their impact on the quality of interpreting should not be ignored. Moreover, data analysis of indicators under level 3 parameters is relatively simple, further studies can explore the calculation of data and data analysis. Due to the special nature of interpreting courses, the number of students in this study is small and the sample size is also small. The results of this study need to be further tested on larger samples.

Acknowledgements

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Note

To pass CATTI Level 2, ordinary exam attendees have to pass exams on two subjects——Comprehensive Ability and Translation. MTI students don't need to attend the exam for Comprehensive Ability and they only have to attend the exam for translation.