

Simultaneous Interpreting from German into Italian: the Importance of Preparation on a Selection of Cultural Items

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Abstract

According to the AIIC, the forwarding of preparation material to interpreters prior to simultaneous interpreting (SI) is a contractual term, as it enables interpreters to fully harness their expertise and provide a better service. Yet, despite being largely acknowledged as a fundamental support tool and a helpful resource by professional interpreters and students alike, preparation has been the subject of a limited number of experimental studies. This study aims to examine the importance of preparation for the SI of speeches including a number of cultural items, in order to both underline the importance of previous knowledge for achieving a higher level of proficiency in SI and to raise awareness in speakers and event managers about the need to provide interpreters with all the relevant documents.

Introduction

When confronted with the question “Is preparation in SI useful?” most interpreters (professionals and students) will instinctively and promptly answer in the affirmative. Perhaps it is because of the intuitive nature of this answer that a limited number of studies have been carried out to date on the importance of preparation in SI.

Experts in SI have asserted that knowledge of the SI context enables the interpreter to activate relevant mental frames or schemes, which help to anticipate the content of the Source Text (ST) and overcome difficult passages (Palazzi 1990, Kalina 1998, Riccardi 2001). Moreover, adequate preparation influences comprehension, translation and production processes, therefore it can be considered a

strategy in SI (Kalina 1998). Since the ability to combine strategies flexibly and correctly is considered a hallmark of expertise (Riccardi 1998), investigating the way preparation influences SI could represent a contribution for defining the concept of expertise itself.

The aim of this study is to examine whether preparation influences the SI of speeches with quite a high density of cultural-specific items (*realia* or *cultural items*), which, like technical terms (Gile 1984), are not always easily inferred based on the context alone, thereby leading to disruptions in the interpreter's output during SI.

Cultural-specific terms have been defined as

[...] words and combinations of words denoting objects and concepts characteristic of the way of life, the culture, the social and historical development of one nation and alien to another. (Florin 1993: 123)

For this purpose, a number of interpreters (both students and professionals) were asked to simultaneously interpret two STs on similar topics from German into Italian, both including several cultural items. Relevant preparation was introduced as a variable and was provided to a group of interpreters beforehand.

1. Strategies, creativity and intercultural aspects in SI

1.1. SI as a strategic and creative process

Despite a number of shared features, the setting and conditions of SI lead to message comprehension and elaboration processes that are unlike those of monolingual interaction. Both types of processes are dynamic and share two main comprehension strategies: "knowledge-driven" strategies (based on context and selection and implementation of encyclopaedic knowledge) and "data-driven" strategies (based on information provided by ST words and syntax). According to such strategies, the information processing direction can be either top-down or bottom-up (van Dijk and Kintsch 1983: 4, 84, 154, 205, 351).

At the beginning of SI, due to the difficulty in predicting how the ST will develop, interpreters need to select and process relevant information. To this end, they tend to rely more on morphological and syntactical elements, i.e. using more bottom-up information at first (Riccardi and Snelling 1997: 144). The use of strategies then unfolds in a specific manner during SI, with top-down strategies being integrated later due to the interaction of the interpreter's knowledge with linguistic data.

SI differs from monolingual communication as the latter is made possible by similar cultural and language knowledge shared by participants (Kalina 1998: 102-113), whereas interpreters often suffer from an "information deficit" (especially during technical SI), as they do not possess an equal share of the specific and lexical knowledge of participants.

Such differences, together with the simultaneous nature of SI processes, require interpreters to adopt specific strategies in order to build a mental model (or scheme) of the ST, starting from its superficial and initial traits (i.e. combining top-down and bottom-up processes). Strategic processes have been defined

as “*intentional auf die Erreichung eines bestimmten Ziels ausgerichtet*” (Kohn 1990: 110), i.e. intentional processes based upon cognitive experience aimed at overcoming an obstacle and saving cognitive resources.

Kalina (1998: 115) divides strategies in SI into two main categories: strategies for ST comprehension and strategies for TT (Target Text) production. Only the former will be closely examined here, as they pertain to the subject of this paper.

In order to fill the “information gap” separating interpreters and primary participants, the former adopt strategies aiming to harness any available knowledge in order to understand the ST (*Wissensaktivierung*) (Kalina 1998: 115). This group of strategies includes preparation (e.g. collecting information about the SI context, analysing similar texts, drafting glossaries etc.) and inferences. The latter help overcome knowledge gaps caused by implicit information included in the ST and/or poor audio input quality and enable the interpreter to formulate hypothesis about how the ST will develop, thereby anticipating what will come next.

In his analysis of cognitive processes underlying expertise, Reason (1990: 43) identified two categories of strategies applied by humans when confronted with problems: *skill-based* and *knowledge-based* strategies. Riccardi (1998: 174) linked this classification to SI and inferred that the former are based upon the interpreters’ abilities and development of automatic mechanisms, which enable them to save cognitive resources, whereas the latter are based upon previous knowledge and require extra cognitive effort. When combined, they help interpreters use and structure their encyclopaedic knowledge in order to create a frame of mind for the ST by making balanced use of cognitive resources while creatively adapting such frames or schemes to the ST. SI thus becomes a creative process during which the interpreter combines and connects linguistic and extra-linguistic information to find appropriate solutions by keeping the cognitive burden at an acceptable level.

1.2. SI as an interlinguistic and intercultural activity

Since the context of SI is a one-time event and as such the interpreter makes linguistic choices based upon relevant elements, SI cannot be examined without considering the context in which it takes place (Riccardi 2001: 88). In order to make such choices, being familiar with the event helps the interpreter activate the relevant mental schemes to understand the ST. As already anticipated, preparation is required beforehand for the schemes to be applied, and this can be strengthened and enhanced during the event.

Pöhhacker (1994: 46) also points out that by being familiar with the event, the interpreter can become more aware of the aim of the conference, the participants and the real target of the SI (audience and target do not always coincide, e.g. during press conferences).

SI can also be considered a service provided in order to enable mutual comprehension and satisfaction of the speaker’s and audience’s communication needs (Viezzi 1996: 42). To correctly express the communication aims of the speaker and to enable the listener to understand them, the interpreter must be aware of what the speaker’s objectives are – and, once again, preparation can be a good way to understand and anticipate them.

1.2.1. Cultural items

Since it involves two (or more) languages, SI is unavoidably an intercultural activity; the greater the distance between the cultures of the ST and the TT, the greater the effort the interpreter must make to fill in all possible gaps (Viezzi 1996: 63).

Culture-bound terms (together with rhetorical style, norms for social interaction, etc.) constitute cultural elements that the interpreter must be aware of in order to fill the knowledge gap, as his or her aim is to produce a TT that has a similar effect on foreign listeners as it would on listeners belonging to the same cultural community of the speaker.

Culture-bound terms belong to a larger category of cultural items, which also includes proper nouns, names of institutions and geographical names. Since cultural items differ according to culture, they may represent an obstacle in SI, requiring the interpreter to acknowledge and fill possible information gaps by adapting the cultural item to the target culture. Moreover, according to Viezzi (1996), such gaps can also include an additional, connotative meaning that the cultural items may have acquired in a given culture:

[...] possono assumere uno specifico valore culturale [...] nella misura in cui in una o più comunità essi sono contraddistinti da un valore connotativo accanto a quello denotativo; nella misura, cioè, in cui non hanno esclusivamente un valore referenziale, ma implicano qualcosa di più. Sono associati ad eventi specifici, determinano una qualche risposta emotiva: [...] (Viezzi 1996: 65)

Proper nouns make up a specific group of cultural items which often recur in SI and may well be a hindrance, as pointed out by Gile (1984: 79). They can either be simple ("*noms propres simples*", identifying a person, a place or an object) or composed ("*noms propres composés*", made up of a number of words). Irrespective of their nature, they require the interpreter to adopt specific strategies in order to overcome such obstacles and to achieve three main aims: giving the audience the same complete information, limiting any loss of information and saving cognitive resources.

2. The importance of preparation in SI

One of the main reasons most interpreters agree that adequate preparation facilitates and improves SI is that it enables them to identify a specific number of possible topics, thereby activating relevant mental frames. As Taylor states (1990: 25):

[...] studying a subject prior to listening to it (and in our specific case prior to interpreting it) makes that listener better able to process and understand the discourse he hears. [...] The gradual absorption of general world knowledge and the specific absorption of temporary information when required will help to [...] render the interpreter's inferential processing times, understanding and consequent performance that much more effective.

If the interpreter's preparation is not adequate, he will have to integrate his knowledge during the event itself, with an increased cognitive effort during the SI (Riccardi 2001: 91).

The interpreter's preparation can be either general or task specific. According to Snelling (2009), all interpreters should be provided with general linguistic and cultural knowledge of the language pairs; a diversified knowledge of the specific event type requiring SI is, however, equally important (Palazzi 1990). Depending on the nature of the conference, the interpreter may, therefore, be provided with dossiers or documents before or during the event, and may have the opportunity to discuss problems directly or ask the speakers questions during an introductory briefing organised for this purpose.

According to Riccardi (2001: 92), knowledge about the event framework can be improved by acquiring information about five basic aspects: first, the topic, which helps identify a limited number of subjects of the speech and creates expectations in the public. Second, the speaker, as communication aims and rhetorical style are closely linked. Third, the audience, depending on whom the interpreter may be required to make implicit information in the ST explicit and adapt the TT. Fourth, the ST, as written speeches and off-the-cuff discourse have very different prosodic features. Finally, the languages involved, as they include both language and cultural information.

A further aspect was identified by Gile (1989) and Pöchhacker (1994: 52): the "conference type". The event can be considered as a "hypertext", including all contributions by different speakers, featuring a number of characteristics: structure, density of information, visual material shown during the conference etc.

2.1. Preparation as a variable in SI experimental studies

Anderson (1979) carried out three experimental studies in order to study both the cognitive and linguistic aspects of interpretation and to further investigate the parameters involved in SI and the conditions underlying the process. Two of these studies were aimed at observing the contextual conditions and the environment surrounding the performance of SI: one was aimed at ascertaining if the visual context has any effect on SI, while the other aimed to verify whether prior information about the context or the content of the speech to be interpreted makes any difference to the interpreting process. The latter study involved 12 professional simultaneous interpreters with a minimum of 5 years' experience; all of them were given the possibility to perform a warm up SI. The input material was taken from videotape recordings.

The interpreters were split into three groups, and each group was provided with a different level of preparation (or none): the first group was given a written copy of the speech shortly before the SI; the second group received a summary of the speech introducing the context, while the third group had no preparation at all. Anderson analysed two main aspects of the TT, namely intelligibility and information content, by means of the two scales assessing intelligibility and informativeness developed by Carroll (1966) (not specifically for SI).

The results did not show any statistically significant influence of preparation on the SI as interpreters with different levels of preparation achieved similar results. According to Anderson, the study could have been affected by three main weaknesses: high variability in the test subjects (the only parameter was five years or more of experience), different degrees of difficulty of a number of passages of the ST, and the interpreters being used to interpreting “from scratch”, without being provided with any preparatory material beforehand.

Anderson (1979: 109) then suggested that the nature of the STs themselves used in the study may have influenced the results, as the speech dealt with general topics and did not contain any specific scientific or technical terms.

Kalina (1998: 114, 202) affirmed that scientific conferences require the interpreters to be provided with specific material a number of days before the event. As a result, preparation becomes both a way to fill the knowledge gap between the interpreter and the audience and to prevent incorrect interpretation, as well as a strategy to take correct lexical and syntactic decisions, to adapt the rhetorical style and to support skill-based strategies.

The aim of SI is to convey what is being said; therefore one could claim that the ST alone should be enough for the interpreter to produce a TT. However, the interpreter must start producing the TT without having listened to the whole text. “External” knowledge may then help fill this gap by supporting the comprehension process, i.e. helping the interpreter to understand what is being said more readily.

This hypothesis is supported by the study carried out by Kalina (1998: 202) on the *Würzburg-Korpus*, i.e. a collection of data (recordings of SI by professionals and surveys) gathered during the foundation symposium of the Association for European Criminal Law, which took place in Würzburg, and during the experimental study organised two years later at the University of Heidelberg: a “replay” of the Würzburg conference during which the speeches were interpreted by SI students. The results were then compared and analysed.

The preparation strategies adopted by one professional interpreter and five SI students were analysed. The materials collected by the interpreters for the task were analysed and the interpreters were asked a number of questions about their preparatory process (start time, type, duration of preparation, use of the material collected in the booth, preparation during the event, etc.).

The study then focused on the recordings of the SI of six speeches whose transcripts were available and were given to the interpreters beforehand, and on the notes the interpreters had made on the transcripts themselves.

The study resulted in a number of findings: first, it was observed that preparation was linked to the anticipation strategy on the one hand, but led to an increase in the use of word-by-word interpreting on the other (i.e. the process was more semantically-oriented) (Kalina, 1998: 203). Secondly, the study highlighted that the professional interpreter reacted more promptly than the students whenever the speaker “deviated” from the written text. Thirdly, as preparation interacts with other strategies and influences them (i.e. segmentation and anticipation), it contributes to saving cognitive resources. Basic cognitive processes are thus “moved” to the phase preceding the SI, which means the cognitive burden on interpreters during SI is “lighter”.

3. Experimental study

Intercultural communication is a process including a wide variety of factors, which go well beyond the purely linguistic aspects (Spencer-Oatey 2008: 2). The concept of culture is one which is intuitive yet hard to define (Žegarac 2008: 49), as it includes both physical and abstract objects. However, in order to focus our investigation on a selection of countable and easily identifiable items which could work as a litmus test to check the influence of preparation, in addition to giving the experimental study as defined a structure and scope as possible in order to allow it to be replicated, if required, we deliberately selected only a few categories of culturally connoted items. This choice was primarily to narrow down the topics for the study by concentrating on a small number of representative items, and secondarily to continue the exploration of a research field already examined by other scholars (Gile: 1984).

Moving from Anderson's study of the relevance of prior information in SI and from Kalina's study of the *Würzburg-Korpus* and her findings concerning preparation, an experimental study was carried out in 2011 at the SSLMIT in Trieste within the framework of the author's unpublished thesis.

The study aimed at a further examination of several aspects with respect to the studies mentioned above. The main weaknesses of Anderson's study were the nature of the ST (general greetings) and the short time the interpreters had to prepare for the SI (they were given the material shortly beforehand). As for Kalina's study, the number of SIs analysed was quite small (five SI students and one professional interpreter).

Before carrying out the experimental study described in this article, the author decided to choose recordings of speeches including topics over and above formal greetings (i.e. with a higher informational content), to provide the interpreters involved with the preparatory material one week before recording the SIs, and to recruit a slightly larger sample of interpreters. Unlike Anderson's and Kalina's studies, no transcripts of the speeches were provided to the interpreters beforehand, thus creating a rather different context (the effects of the availability of a transcript of the speech to be interpreted were not tested). In this respect, the study clearly differs from those of Anderson and Kalina, as it focuses on the forms of preparation an interpreter can undertake starting from general references (names of speakers, topic, general context etc.).

3.1. Method

The study was mainly centred on the observation of SI students, i.e. novices. Differences in TTs were analysed according to the different levels of preliminary preparation of the (SI) students. Though it was not considered a variable *per se*, a warm up SI was carried out by all participants and its incidence with respect to preparation was later observed.

Two professional interpreters were also involved in the experimental study, and their results were used by way of comparison. The sample size for these professionals is certainly quite small, and it was not meant to be introduced as a control group

in the study. Nonetheless their participation was the only way to observe whether preparation affects the performance and final product of SI students in terms of making it more “professional”-like. By gaining an insight into how experienced interpreters deal with cultural items, it was possible to observe possible analogies and differences with the approach taken by the students. In this sense, this study can be considered a pilot study that helped outline a number of trends, which could be verified in future research investigating the expert / novice paradigm.

3.2. Materials

The experimental material consisted of two speeches of equal duration delivered in German by two different speakers during the same event. All participants were asked to simultaneously interpret both STs into Italian, with a break of about five minutes between the two. The first ST was considered a warm up speech.

The STs chosen were two speeches by German politicians given on 9 November 2010 during the same event, the *Europa Rede* in Berlin, a yearly conference aiming to offer a discussion platform for influential politicians of all parties. The speeches are similar in content and include similar cultural items (mostly connected with German and European history), though the second speech features a higher density of cultural-bound terms (first speech: 36 recurrences of cultural items out of 1,660 words; second speech: 82 recurrences of cultural items out of 1,394 words). The keynote speech of the event was given by Herman van Rompuy; the two STs adopted for the study were given as an introduction.

The first speech lasted 12' 24" and was “traditionally” structured: the speaker first greeted and thanked the participants, then recalled historic events connected to the day before moving on to current aspects of European politics. Due to its clear structure and to the smaller number of cultural items included, this speech was assigned as a “warm up function”. The second speech lasted 12' 28" and featured an original, “non-standard” structure, as it began directly *in medias res*. The speaker briefly thanked the most important participants before immediately dwelling on historical events connected to the 9th of November. He then welcomed the most famous participants, giving their names and posts held, and finally related a short anecdote about a famous European politician.

Both STs were only available as audio inputs.

3.3. Participants

The experimental study included eight interpretation students who had successfully completed their first and second year exams of German to Italian SI. Seven of the eight students had also passed their final exams at SSLMIT – Trieste. Two students were native German speakers, two students had German as their B language and four students had German as their C language.

As mentioned above, two professional interpreters were included in the study in order to investigate possible trends and analogies between preparation

and professional results. Both have extensive experience in SI and are accredited AIIC members.

3.4. Preparation

In order to assess the importance of preparation in SI, students were divided into two groups. One group was provided with the opportunity to prepare for the SI in order to create a context similar to real life. All the members in this group were provided with the same Word® file with general information on the context one week before interpreting. The same document was handed out to the group “without preparation” and to the professionals a few minutes before interpreting. All subjects of the study were given a list of the participants at the event quoted by the speaker in alphabetical order before going into the booth.

The preparation hand-out included the subject of the event, its title and the day on which it took place, the names of the foundations which organised the conference, a description of the speakers and the name of the keynote speaker, in addition to a short reference to the 9th of November (a crucial date in German history, as the “Night of Broken Glass/Kristallnacht Pogrom” and the Fall of the Berlin Wall took place on this date).

3.5. Procedure

All SIs were carried out between February and May 2011 at the SSLMIT of the University of Trieste. The TTs of the participants were recorded on different days. All the booths were provided with Philips equipment, and the TTs were recorded with a Microtrack 24/96 M-AUDIO digital double-track recorder (DAT) and saved on a SanDisk Compact Flash® memory card. The TTs were then converted to MP3 format in order to transcribe them.

All the participants had a pen and paper in order to take notes during the SI. After simultaneously interpreting the two STs, all participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire designed to investigate whether they found the preparation (for those who had the opportunity to prepare for the SI) and warm up SI useful and if they perceived cultural items as possible hindrances.

Five types of recurring cultural items were identified: proper nouns/posts held, toponyms, dates, events and institutions. One or more possible translations of the elements were identified in *ad-hoc* charts (i.e. possible ways to transfer the original meaning of the item to the target language) and the time in which the element appeared in the ST was noted.

An orthographic transcription of the TTs was carried out to enable comparison of the results. All cultural items of the STs were inserted in tables including the type of cultural item and the time the item was quoted in the ST and in the TT. Such terms (or their absence) were then identified in the TTs together with the strategy adopted to deliver them by means of comparison with their possible previously formulated translations. The results were included in the tables which were then divided according to speech, whether or not preparation was allowed, and professional status.

	Proper nouns / posts held	Toponyms	Dates	Events	Institutions
First speech	20	2	6	5	3
Second speech	45	5	19	7	6

Table 1. Types and numbers of cultural items analyzed in both speeches.

3.6. Results

3.6.1. Strategies adopted

All the interpreters dealt with the submitted cultural items in three main ways: they included the cultural items in their TTs, they made a mistake in delivering it, or they did not deliver the item at all.

In order to compare the results of the study, the strategies adopted to deliver the cultural items were identified based on an *ad hoc* classification (see table 1), as names and definitions were taken and adapted both from Kalina (1998) and Pedersen (2007).

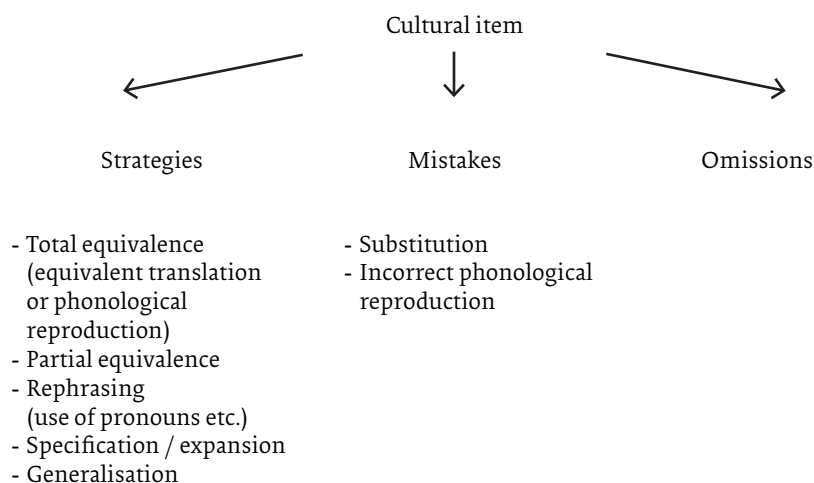


Table 2. Different ways the cultural items were (not) rendered in the target language by the interpreters

a) Total equivalence

The subjects provided an equivalent translation for the item, i.e. the cultural item was fully translated or transferred to the TT by conveying the complete original information.

This tactic was applied by the interpreters in two main ways: first, through transcoding (see Kalina 1998: 118), i.e. by repeating full proper names correctly,

by using a standard translation or “official equivalent” of the item, which Pedersen (2007: 4) describes as follows:

For there to be an Official Equivalent, some sort of official decision by people in authority over an extra-linguistic Culture-bound reference is needed [...] (Pedersen, 2007: 4)

Ex. 1

ST: [...] und dafür möchte ich **Herman Van Rompuy** ganz herzlich danken
[and therefore I would like to thank Herman Van Rompuy for this]

TT: [...] e quindi vorrei ringraziare **Herman van Rompuy** [...]
[and therefore I would like to thank Herman van Rompuy]

Ex. 2

ST: [...] der erste ständige **Präsident des Europäischen Rates**
[the first permanent President of the European Council]

TT: [...] il primo **Presidente permanente del Consiglio Europeo** [...]
[the first permanent President of the European Council]

Ex. 3

ST: [...] der **Fall des Eisernen Vorhangs**
[the fall of the Iron Curtain]

TT: [...] la **caduta della Cortina di Ferro** [...]
[the fall of the Iron Curtain]

Secondly, by opting for a phonological reproduction (*retention*) of the items (when understandable by an Italian audience). According to Pedersen (2007: 4), retention is the most ST-oriented strategy, as it allows an element in the SL to “enter” the TL (e.g.: *Bundestag*).

Ex. 4

ST: [...] Herr Präsident des deutschen **Bundestages** lieber Norbert Lammert
[...]
[President of the German Bundestag, honourable Norbert Lammert]

TT: [...] presidente del **Bundestag** tedesco caro Norbert Lammert [...]
[President of the German Bundestag dear Norbert Lammert]

b) Partial equivalence

The subjects omitted one or more redundant elements without changing the information content of the item (e.g. the shortened version of years).

Ex. 5

ST: [...] auch der neunte november **neunzehneunundachtzig** [...]
[Also the ninth of November nineteen-eighty-nine]

TT: [...] il nove novembre dell'**ottantanove** [...]
[the ninth of November eighty-nine]

c) Rephrasing

The participants obtained an equivalent translation by using pronouns and other semantic elements, or by changing the order of the elements in the TT (e.g. saying “him” instead of full name).

Ex. 6

ST: [...] Hans-Gert Pöttering wäre nicht **Hans-Gert Pöttering** wenn [...] *[Hans-Gert Pöttering would not be Hans-Gert Pöttering if]*

TT: [...] Hans-Gert Pöttering non sarebbe **lui** se [...] *[Hans-Gert Pöttering would not be himself if]*

d) Specification

The participants added information that was not included in the ST, further specifying the cultural item. This strategy is defined by Kalina (1998: 119) as “Expansion”.

Ex. 7

ST: [...] der **Mauerfall** [...] *[the fall of the wall]*

TT: [...] la **caduta del muro di Berlino** [...] *[the fall of the Berlin wall]*

e) Generalisation

The subjects substituted a cultural item with a more general one (e.g. “*der Historiker Heinrich August Winkler*” delivered as “an important historian”).

Ex. 8

ST: [...] der **Historiker Heinrich August Winkler** [...] *[the historian Heinrich August Winkler]*

TT: [...] uno **storico molto importante** [...] *[a very important historian]*

Furthermore, two kinds of mistakes were identified in the TTs:

f) Substitution

The interpreter removed the cultural item and substituted it with an incorrect one due to an error in comprehension or translation, thereby changing the information conveyed by the ST.

Ex. 9

ST: [...] als **Haushaltsminister** [...] trug er entscheidend [...] *[as Minister for the Budget he contributed in a decisive way to]*

TT: [...] <da **ministro degli esteri** ha contribuito> [...] *[as Minister for Foreign Affairs he contributed to]*

g) Incorrect phonological reproduction
Incorrect pronunciation of a name (where a completely different name was invented), thereby causing the loss of the relevant information and the transfer of different information to that originally provided.

Ex. 10

ST: [...] Kardinal **Geoff Sterzinsky** [...]
[Cardinal Geoff Sterzinsky]

TT: [...] cardinale **Geoff Sterzing** [...]
[Cardinal Geoff Sterzing]

A third macro category was identified, i.e. omissions. As Kalina (1998: 120) points out, omissions can be either strategic or non-strategic. The former are a way for the interpreter to “filter” and carry out a selection of the essential elements of the ST, especially if some of them are redundant. The latter involves the loss of information. Since no strategic omission was identified in the TTs representing the subject of this study, only non-strategic omissions have been examined.

Ex. 11

ST: [...] heute vor zweiundsiebzig Jahren fand in der Reichspogromnacht das dunkeste, das unfassbare und unbegreifbare Kapitel der deutschen Geschichte [...]
[seventy-two years ago the Reich's Pogrom Night was the darkest, the incomprehensible, inconceivable chapter of German history]

TT: [...] il nove novembre è anche un una giornata di (.) ricordo (.) perché si è tenuta il (.) si è tenuto il capitolo più buio della storia tedesca [...]
[the ninth of November is also a significant day, as on this date the darkest chapter of German history took place]

3.7. Students' performance

All the data collected was divided into the five categories of cultural items identified in the STs. These were then classified according to how the elements were delivered by comparing them with an *ad-hoc* chart of previously identified possible translations and, finally, according to the presence or absence of preparation. Lastly, this scheme was also used to compare the results of SI students with those of the professionals¹. The aim of the analysis was both to show the main trends in the two groups of students (with and without preparation) and to compare the TTs of the first (warm up) speech with those of the second (“official”) speech.

The results were converted into percentages in order to enable clearer comparison. The most relevant results from the students are described below; the

¹ All detailed tables and charts concerning the analysis of the STs and the results of the study can be found in the author's unpublished dissertation (Scaglioni 2011).

results from the professionals are not fully represented here, however, they will be mentioned in the following section.

Students given the opportunity to prepare for the SI are identified with the abbreviation “SP” (students with preparation) and students who did not prepare for the interpretation are identified with the abbreviation “SWP” (students without preparation).

a) Proper nouns and posts held

When interpreting this category of cultural items during the warm up speech, SWP adopted total or partial equivalencies in 51% of cases, whereas they adopted rephrasing in 5%, generalisation in 1%, and specification in 8% of cases.

Omissions, incorrect phonological reproduction and substitution made up 35% of total deliveries.

In interpreting the second speech, the total number of total and partial equivalencies increased (67%), whereas the number of omissions and errors decreased (22%). However, strategies such as rephrasing and specification were less frequently adopted by the students (11% overall).

In terms of the TTs by the SP for the first speech, the students found a total (54%) or partial (23%) equivalent for proper nouns / posts held, and omitted or gave a phonetically incorrect equivalent in 18% of cases. As for the use of strategies, rephrasing (4%) and specification (3%) were adopted. As for errors, the highest percentage is represented by omissions (15%).

In interpreting the second speech, the SP adopted total equivalencies in 64% of cases and resorted to other strategies more often (e.g. specification: 6%). The number of omissions decreased as did the number of phonetically incorrect equivalents (9%).

As far as this category goes, the name and the post of Herman van Rompuy is a good example: it was sometimes omitted or, as regards the name, mispronounced by both groups (though more often by the SWP) in the TTs of the first speech, whereas the information was correctly transferred or even the subject of specification in the TTs of the second speech.

Ex. 12 – SWP; First speech

ST: [...] und ein Europäischer Rat in dem die siebenundzwanzig Staaten [...] zusammen mit dem Kommissionspräsidenten unter der Leitung von **Herman van Rompuy** die Leitlinien der europäischen Entwicklung beschließen [...]

[and a European Council in which the twenty-seven states [...] together with the President of the Commission under the guidance of Herman van Rompuy decide the guidelines]

TT: [...] e un consiglio che insieme ai presidenti della commissione (.) stabilisce [...]

[and a council which, together with the presidents of the Commission, decides]

Ex. 13 – SWP; Second speech

ST: [...] wird gehalten von dem [...] **Präsidenten des Europäischen Rates** [...]

[held by [...] the President of the European Council]

TT: [...] viene tenuto dal **presidente del Consiglio van Rompuy** [...]
[held by the President of the Council van Rompuy]

b) Toponyms

Toponyms only represent a small number of cultural items in both speeches (2 out of 36 in the first speech and 5 out of 82 in the second speech). The names of places quoted were often repeated by the two speakers, and it should be pointed out that the second speech contained a higher number of toponyms which would be less familiar to an Italian audience (e.g. names of museums located in Berlin etc.).

For the first speech, SWP resorted to total equivalences in 38% of cases, resorted to rephrasing in 13% of cases and omitted toponyms in 50% of cases. When interpreting the second speech, the number of total equivalencies increased (75%) whereas rephrasing (5%) and omissions (20%) decreased.

SP correctly delivered 100% of toponyms for the first speech, always adopting total equivalencies.

As far as the second speech is concerned, the number of total equivalencies decreased (65%), whereas students resorted to generalisation in 5% of cases. The number of errors also increased (30%).

Despite the relatively minor representativeness of this category, it should be noted that during the SI of the first speech, the SWP omitted the name of the German capital city in some cases, whereas it was correctly transferred by the same group in most cases during the SI of the second speech.

Ex. 14 – SWP; First speech

ST: [...] ein Willkommen hier **in dieser schönen Kulisse in Berlin** [...]
[you are warmly welcomed in this beautiful backdrop - Berlin]

TT: [...] vorrei ringraziare Herman van Rompuy [...] sono: lieta che tu sia **qui** oggi con me [...]
[I would like to thank Herman van Rompuy [...] I'm glad that you are here with me today]

Ex. 15 – SWP; Second speech

ST: [...] auf der **Museumsinsel im Herzen Berlins** [...]
[on the Isle of the Museums in the heart of Berlin]

TT: [...] nell'**isola dei musei nel cuore di Berlino** [...]
[on the Isle of the Museums in the heart of Berlin]

c) Dates

The date occurring often in both speeches is the 9th of November, quoted in association with different years (1938, 1989, 2009, 2010, 2011). In a number of cases, this date is connected to a precise historical context probably known to the students; in other cases the dates are linked to recent or future events that may be less well known, and therefore less predictable and requiring a greater cognitive effort.

It should be noted that due to its very nature, this category was often the subject of rephrasing (e.g. “(Heute) vor 72 Jahren” became “in 1938”) and rendered with partial equivalents (e.g. “Juli 2007” was delivered as “2007” etc.).

When interpreting the first speech, SWP adopted total equivalencies in 71% of cases and adopted rephrasing in 4% of cases. 25% of dates were omitted or wrongly transferred. As for the second speech, the number of total equivalencies decreased (54%), yet the participants adopted partial equivalents in 13% of cases and resorted to rephrasing in 8% of cases. Mistakes / omissions again equalled 25% of cases.

SP delivered 75% of dates in the first ST with total equivalencies and resorted to rephrasing in 8% of cases. No other strategies were adopted. Mistakes and errors made up 17% of cases.

When delivering the second speech, SP resorted to a wider variety of strategies: total equivalencies made up 68%, partial equivalencies 5% and rephrasing 4%. The participants also adopted generalisation in 3% of cases. The number of mistakes, however, increased (5%); interestingly, “new” and “unpredictable” dates were omitted (14%), i.e. items which were not closely linked to the main topic of the speech and which had probably not been included in the preparation phase.

As stated before, the category “date” is not only the one whose elements were mainly conveyed by partial equivalence or rephrasing, but a number of methods were used to apply these strategies (see examples).

Ex. 16 – SP; Second speech

ST: [...] **am oder um den neunten November** [...]
 [on or around the ninth of November]

TT: [...] **i: il giorno odierno** [...]
 [on the same day as today]

Ex. 17 – SP; Second speech

ST: [...] **auch der neunte November neunzehneunundachtzig** [...]
 [also the ninth of November nineteen-eighty-nine]

TT: [...] **anche il nove novembre dell’ottantanove** [...]
 [the ninth of November eighty-nine]

Ex. 18 – SP; Second speech

ST: [...] **Heute vor zweiundsiebzig Jahren** [...]
 [seventy-two years ago today]

TT: [...] **nel millenovecentotrentotto** [...]
 [in nineteen thirty-eight]

d) Events

This category best identifies the activation of relevant mental frames by the interpreter, as it is the most closely linked to the context.

It should be pointed out that specifications were often used for the term “Fall der Mauer” or “Mauerfall”, as a number of interpreters specified that the wall quoted was the Berlin Wall.

In the TTs of the first speech, SWP adopted total equivalencies in 56% of cases. No other strategies were adopted. Incorrect substitutions made up 31% of cases and omissions accounted for 13%.

The number of total equivalencies increased by 5% in the TTs of the second speech (61%). SWP also resorted to rephrasing (2%), specification (5%), and generalisation (5%). The number of mistakes decreased (2%), yet omissions increased by 12% (25%).

During SI of the first text, SP resorted to total equivalencies in 44% of cases. They resorted to the strategies of specification (6%) and generalisation (6%), wrongly substituted 25% of items and omitted them in 19% of cases.

As for the second ST, the number of total equivalencies increased (64%) and partial equivalencies were also included (2%). Rephrasing amounted to 7% and specification to 16%. The number of errors and omissions decreased (12%).

Interestingly, the SP “scored” better results than the SWP when interpreting the events included in the second speech. Such events could have easily been included in thorough preparation.

Ex. 19 – SWP; Second speech

ST: [...] mit ihm verbinden wir [...] **friedliche Revolution und Mauerfall** [...] *[this day is linked to the peaceful revolution, to the fall of the wall]*

TT: [...] <a questo giorno associamo> [...] **la caduta del muro di Berlino** [...] *[we associate this day with the fall of the Berlin wall]*

Ex. 20 – SP; Second speech

ST: [...] mit ihm verbinden wir **friedliche Revolution und Mauerfall** [...] *[this day is linked to the peaceful revolution, to the fall of the wall]*

TT: [...] noi colleghiamo [...] **una rivoluzione pacifica e la caduta del muro** [...] *[we associate this day with a peaceful revolution and the fall of the wall]*

Ex. 21 – SWP; Second speech

ST: [...] das **Ende der SED Diktatur der Fall des Eisernen Vorhangs** [...] *[the end of the dictatorship of the SED (Socialist Unity Party), the fall of the Iron curtain]*

TT: [...] ha segnato . la **fine . di una dittatura** [...] *[marked the end of a dictatorship]*

Ex. 22 – SP; Second speech

ST: [...] das **Ende der SED Diktatur der Fall des Eisernen Vorhangs** [...] *[the end of the dictatorship of the SED (Socialist Unity Party), the fall of the Iron curtain]*

TT: [...] **fine della s dittatura della SED caduta della Cortina di Ferro** [...] *[the end of the s SED dictatorship, fall of the Iron curtain]*

e) Institutions

A limited variety of institutions were mentioned in both speeches: mainly the three foundations promoting the event. Their names were also included in the list given to the interpreters before the interpretation.

For the first speech, SWP used a total or partial equivalent in 42% of cases. They rephrased the name of the institution in 25% of cases and resorted to specification (8%). Omissions and errors made up 25% of cases.

The overall number of total and partial equivalencies increased in the TTs of the second speech (67%), whereas rephrasing decreased (4%). Specification amounted again to 8%. In 21% of cases the items were omitted; no mistake was made.

SP used a total equivalent in 17% and a partial equivalent in 42% of cases in the first speech. They adopted rephrasing in 33% and specification in 8% of instances; no error / omission was made.

As far as the second speech was concerned, total equivalencies increased (79%), whereas partial equivalencies decreased (8%). Rephrasing was never used and the amount of specifications remained the same. Omissions increased (4%). It should be underlined that the organisations omitted were not included in the list given to the novices prior to the SI, and that the SP achieved better results in conveying this category than SWP.

Ex. 23 – SWP; Second speech

- ST:** [...] die Stiftung Zukunft Berlin, die Robert Bosch Stiftung und wir die Konrad Adenauer Stiftung [...]
[*the Zukunft Berlin Foundation, the Robert Bosch Foundation and us, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation*]
- TT:** [...] la Fondazione Futuro di Berlino Zukunft Berlin la fondazione Konrad Adenauer [...]
[*the Future of Berlin Zukunft Berlin Foundation the Konrad Adenauer Foundation*]

Ex. 24 – SP; Second speech

- ST:** [...] die Stiftung Zukunft Berlin (.) die Robert Bosch Stiftung und wir die Konrad Adenauer Stiftung [...]
[*the Zukunft Berlin Foundation, the Robert Bosch Foundation and us, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation*]
- TT:** [...] la Fondazione Zukunft Berlin (.) la Fondazione Robert Bosch noi la Fondazione Konrad Adenauer [...]
[*the Zukunft Berlin Foundation, the Robert Bosch Foundation us the Konrad Adenauer Foundation*]

4. Discussion

Based on the results obtained after analysing the data collected, it is possible to state that cultural items represented an obstacle in SI from German into Italian, even if they were known to the students. Moreover, when confronted with cultural items such as those that are the subject of this study, all interpreters adopted a number of strategies according to their cognitive burden when encountering the elements, knowledge of the item etc. Though only five strategies have been identified in this study, many others can be used to overcome obstacles posed by cultural items.

Furthermore, the findings are corroborated by the results of the questionnaires: all the interpreters agreed that the cultural items in the STs were potential obstacles to a fluent delivery and some of them required additional mental effort. The students who were given preparation agreed on its usefulness and all the interpreters affirmed that the warm up SI played a remarkable role in helping them to familiarise themselves with the topic of the SI and supported the SI process for the second ST.

In addition to confirming the hypothesis underlying the experimental study, the results highlighted three further trends. In order to better compare the results and illustrate the trends observed, the results of the study are summarised in the table below where each category has been divided into further strategies and mistakes/omissions. The table shows the overall outcomes of the study, yet it should be pointed out that the second speech included a higher number of cultural items.

Cultural items analysed	Speech	SWP		SP	
		Items transferred through strategies	Mistakes and omissions	Items transferred through strategies	Mistakes and omissions
1) Proper nouns and posts held	1 st	65%	35%	83% ²	18%
	2 nd	78%	22%	88%	12%
2) Toponyms	1 st	50%	50%	100%	
	2 nd	80%	20%	70%	30%
3) Dates	1 st	75%	25%	83%	17%
	2 nd	75%	25%	80%	20%
4) Events	1 st	56%	44%	56%	44%
	2 nd	73%	27%	89%	11%
5) Institutions	1 st	75%	25%	100%	
	2 nd	79%	21%	96%	4%

Table 3. Overall results of the study

The analysis and comparison of the data obtained from the TTs of SWP and SP for each category of cultural item, and more specifically the percentages of elements correctly delivered to those for omitted/wrongly delivered items for each category, provide an index of the comprehension of the items itself, and the interpreter's familiarity with the context. The more elements correctly delivered, the better the comprehension of the ST.

By considering the most numerous category (proper nouns / posts held, which make up more than the half of all the cultural items identified in both

2 The total amount of proper nouns / posts held interpreted by SP during SI of the second speech was 101%, as the percentages have been rounded up for easier comparison of results.

texts), it should be noted that *SP* correctly delivered a higher number of cultural items and made less mistakes / omissions during SI of both speeches compared to *SWP*. *SP* also resorted less often to strategies such as rephrasing, specification and generalisation than *SWP*, as they rendered the item through total equivalencies. Greater familiarity with the names quoted in the speeches for *SP* may have contributed to these results.

The category of toponyms also supports the theory on the usefulness of preparation: *SP* correctly delivered 100% of place names during SI of the first speech.

As for dates and events, *SP* had already developed a higher degree of knowledge of these elements before the SI, whereas *SWP* were not familiar with the context and often resorted to omission. Moreover, as for the category of proper nouns / posts held, *SP* often resorted to total equivalencies. It should be pointed out that *SP* also sometimes adopted the strategy of specification when interpreting events, which could show deeper knowledge of the context and lighter cognitive burden.

Lastly, the category of “institutions” supported the observed trend: more elements were delivered and fewer omissions and mistakes were made by *SP* during the first speech.

To conclude, *SP* not only achieved better results in terms of delivering cultural items, but they also resorted more often to total equivalencies and specification, as they were probably more familiar with the elements and had more cognitive resources at their disposal, thus being able to convey useful information and adapt the TTs for an audience with a different cultural background.

Importance of SI of a warm up speech for SI from German into Italian - In order to observe if the warm up phase has any effect on SI, the results obtained from TTs of the first and second speech were compared. A higher number of cultural item correspondence in the TTs of the second speech may point to greater familiarity with the topics and names included in the ST developed through the SI of a similar warm up speech.

The analysis of proper nouns / posts held shows that both *SWP* and *SP* achieved better results in the SI of the second speech, thereby making fewer mistakes and omissions.

As for toponyms, *SWP* certainly drew advantages from the warm up SI; yet *SP* made more omissions and incorrect substitutions. This could point to a difference in the importance of the warm up SI for the two groups: since it was the only source of relevant knowledge available, the warm up may have allowed *SWP* to achieve a better improvement margin with respect to *SP*. This hypothesis is supported by the results of the “institutions” category: the percentage of correctly translated elements during the second SI decreased slightly for *SP*, whereas it increased for *SWP*.

Dates and events displayed a different trend: *SWP* translated the same number of dates in both speeches, whereas *SP* made more mistakes / omissions during the second SI. As for events, *SP* correctly delivered a higher number of elements during SI of the second speech, whereas *SWP* did the opposite. It should be noted, however, that events and dates were not evenly distributed in the two STs: specifically, the second contained more items than the first. The second

speech included a number of events specific to German history which were not mentioned during the first speech and which were more susceptible to adequate preparation: for SWP they might well have represented new and potentially “unexpected” elements.

Finally, the TTs of SWP registered a remarkable increase in the total equivalencies during the second speech. Such a trend may indicate both the general usefulness of a warm up SI and its importance in the absence of other specific preparation.

Similarities between SP and professional interpreters - The comparison of the results obtained by SP and professional interpreters (who did not receive the preparation hand out), points to a number of similarities. In terms of proper nouns and posts held in the first and second speech, there was an increase in the number of total equivalencies and a decrease in partial equivalencies for both groups. The subjects also resorted less frequently to rephrasing and more often to specification and generalisation.

Moreover, the same similarity is observed in the data collected for the “dates” category: total equivalencies and rephrasing decreased, whereas partial equivalencies and generalisation increased. Lastly, the same characteristic was also found when analysing the rephrasing, errors and omissions percentages for the “events” category.

Such similarities highlighted a further possible trend: data collected from SP and from professional interpreters share some similarities from a quantitative - and qualitative standpoint. These trends are not only observed in the number of equivalencies and omissions / errors, but also concern the types of strategies adopted, thereby suggesting that preparation can help SI students develop the processes of selection and application of relevant strategies used by professionals.

5. Conclusions

This experimental study represented an opportunity to closely verify the importance of preparation in SI, under set circumstances. The results show that preparation helps activate correct mental frames relevant to the topic of the speech, thus enabling anticipation and correct translation of cultural items. Moreover, they revealed a similar trend in the use of a number of strategies by SI students with preparation and by professional interpreters with no preparation.

Preparation can thus be considered an interpretation strategy (Kalina 1998: 116) that students should adopt to achieve a higher level of professionalism by producing more complete and precise TTs. Expert *adaptive* interpreters (Sunnari/Hild 2010) have been defined as professionals who can simultaneously interpret speeches on different topics effectively by continuing to develop the strategies adopted and improve the output quality. Students of interpretation can profit from this and try to achieve professional results by supporting constant exercise and delivery control through improvement of their general and specific knowledge by means of preparation.

The findings in this study cannot be considered definitive. The study revealed a number of weaknesses that further experimental studies could try to counter,

i.e. the sample of SI students was too small for general conclusions to be drawn, the lack of a “real” control group and the testing of only one possible way for preparing for the SI (autonomous preparation based upon context communicated beforehand). New studies could involve a larger sample of participants, i.e. three equal groups of students and professional interpreters (for professionals to make up a real control group) and a fourth group of students provided with the speech transcript (for a further comparison with the studies by Anderson and Kalina). They could also consider culture from a broader perspective (including other cultural aspects in addition to realia). A further possibility could be to repeat the experimental study by changing the linguistic variable, e.g. by choosing technical speeches to observe if the effects of preparation are even more visible in terms of the information transferred and the personal perceptions of the interpreters.

This experimental study offers a brief view of the gap dividing SI students and professional interpreters as far as SI of STs including cultural items is concerned. A study based on a similar premise could be carried out in order to investigate how experience influences ability, as well as the strategies applied to deal with the SI of cultural items. Such research could contribute to achieving a better understanding of where the gap lies between students and professional interpreters, thereby guiding students for the development of their SI skills.

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