การทำงานเป็นทีมในล่ามพูดพร้อม
Teamwork in Simultaneous Interpretation

ปกรณ์ รัตนบุตร และ หนึ่งหทัย แรงผลสัมฤทธิ์
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บทคัดย่อ

ล่ามพูดพร้อมในการประชุมต้องทำงานภายใต้ความกดดันและข้อจำกัดของเวลาจึงจำเป็นต้องมีล่ามมากกว่าหนึ่งคนในห้องทำงานเพื่อแบ่งเบาความเหนื่อยล้า รับมือกับข้อผิดพลาดและช่วยเพิ่มคุณภาพของงาน งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้ได้สำรวจกระบวนการทำงานร่วมกันของล่ามพูดพร้อมด้วยการสังเกตการทำงานล่ามในสถานการณ์จำลองและสัมภาษณ์นิสิตล่าม 4 รายซึ่งนำไปสู่ข้อสรุปที่ว่าวิธีการจดตัวเลขและข้อมูลแล้วส่งให้คู่ล่ามเป็นวิธีให้ความช่วยเหลือที่มีประสิทธิภาพและไม่รบกวนสมาธิกัน นอกจากนี้ยังมีการทำแบบสำรวจความคิดเห็นจากล่ามอิสระชาวไทยจำนวน 35 รายที่มีประสบการณ์แตกต่างกัน เพื่อสำรวจพฤติกรรมในห้องทำงานและความคาดหวังเรื่องความช่วยเหลือจากคู่ล่าม ซึ่งพิสูจน์ได้ว่าล่ามมีความคาดหวังให้คู่ล่ามอยู่ในห้องทำงานเพื่อคอยจดคำศัพท์ให้และคอยเตือนเมื่อเกิดข้อผิดพลาดขึ้น

คำสำคัญ: 1. การทำงานเป็นทีม 2. คู่ล่าม 3. ล่ามพูดพร้อม 4. ความช่วยเหลือ

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Abstract

Simultaneous interpreters work under pressure and time constraints. Therefore, at least two interpreters are needed in the interpreter's booth in order to overcome fatigue, cope with mistakes and help improve interpretation quality. This study aims to examine cooperation in simultaneous interpretation by simulated setting observation and in-depth interviews with four student interpreters. It leads to the conclusion that writing down numbers and information then passing it to boothmates is an efficient and non-disturbing way to offer assistance. Additionally, a survey was conducted among thirty-five Thai freelance interpreters of different levels of experience to find out their in-booth behaviors, expectations and needs with regard to assistance from their booth partners. The results indicate that interpreters expect their boothmates to be in the booth with them to help write down words and let them know when they make mistakes.

Keywords: 1. simultaneous interpretation 2. teamwork
3. boothmate 4. cooperation 5. Assistance

1. Introduction

Conference interpreting is a very demanding profession which requires a wide range of specialized knowledge and skills. Taylor-Bouladon (2007, p. 2) compares this activity with tightrope walking without a safety net and states that "it requires not only an exacting knowledge of languages but also thorough training in interpreting skills and the ability to understand people with all sorts of different accents, of different cultural backgrounds, and in a wide variety of subjects - even the most technical."

In fact, the comparison with tightrope was previously used in Gile (1995, 1999), although with a somewhat different meaning. For Gile, a tightrope situation is one in which one works close to his/her maximum capacity, as it is the case with interpreters' working conditions. His Tightrope Hypothesis can also explain that errors in interpretation are not only caused by the difficulty of the speech but also by the fact that most of the time interpreters work close to processing capacity saturation (Gile, 1999: 153). In other words, errors are sometimes produced when the available cognitive capacity of the interpreter is insufficient to process what he is listening to, partly due to the fact that the task is

performed under stress and time constraints, which leads to fatigue. (Chmiel, 2008, p. 261)

To cope with such a challenge, simultaneous interpreters need booth partners to help them. In simultaneous interpreting, at least two interpreters are required in a booth. While one is actively interpreting, the other can concentrate better on listening and hence is more likely to have a better understanding of a complex speech than his/her active boothmate, who needs to split his/her attention between listening comprehension and speaking. The off-mike interpreter can help by looking up the meaning of a word and passing the information to the active partner. Generally, interpreters can help by taking notes and writing down things that can be helpful to their boothmates. Therefore, having another interpreter in the booth is a great help to the working interpreter. (Gile, 1995, pp. 192-194)

The necessity of having a partner in simultaneous interpreting is also reflected in the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC)'s professional standards: "An interpreter shall not, as a general rule, work alone in a simultaneous interpretation booth, without the availability of a colleague to relieve her or him should the need arises."

(AIIC, 2012). This is to ensure the necessary quality and to relieve the interpreter of the fatigue and pressure involved in the working conditions. In some language combinations that include rarer languages like Arabic, Chinese or Japanese, it is the norm that three interpreters are present in a simultaneous booth, as they have to work two-way (Taylor-Bouladon, 2007, pp. 64-65). In certain Japanese standards (Simul International, 2005), three to four interpreters are required for a simultaneous interpreting assignments that lasts longer than three hours.

It is evident that for simultaneous interpreters working in a team not only is it a way to cope with fatigue by taking turns in interpreting and providing support as needed during the conference, but it also enhances the quality of work. Having a colleague listen, take notes and work as backup can significantly help the interpreter to catch up better with the speaker and verify the accuracy of the interpreted rendition. (Alison, 2010)

Although the professional standards require simultaneous interpreters to always work in a team, there are yet no adequate guidelines or good practices on how interpreters can best work in a team. Even in formal interpreting courses, the trainers attach focus more on developing interpreting

skills such as anticipation, self-monitoring or terminology development rather than on cooperation in the booth (Chmiel, 2008, p. 263). This is also true in Thailand, as short courses in interpreting or even the M.A. program in interpreting barely discuss the role of boothmates or how to help boothmates. This study therefore aims at exploring good practices in teamwork in simultaneous interpretation which will eventually lead to better quality of work.

2. Simultaneous interpretation and teamwork

Simultaneous interpretation in English, French, German, and Russian has been documented since 1928. This mode of interpretation was used in conferences such as the Scientific Organization Committee in 1929 in Geneva. The first booths were used in 1933 at a meeting of the Communist International (Komintern) (Taylor-Bouladon, 2007, p. 15). Between 1945 and 1946, after the end of World War II, at the Nuremberg trials in Germany, simultaneous interpreters were employed to interpret the Nazi war crime trials into four languages (English, French, German and Russian). There were a total of thirty-six interpreters, divided into three groups, each group consisting of twelve interpreters, corresponding to four languages, three per language (Gaiba, 1998, pp. 59-76). The

interpreters for the four languages sat together in four non-soundproof booths that looked like working desks with a small glass pane in front. In each booth there were three headsets (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 Working conditions of simultaneous interpreters in 1945-1946
(Source: http://aiic.net/page/983/the-nuremberg-trial/lang/1)

While the twelve interpreters in the first group were working in the booth at the court, the second group would work as backup for the first group and would take turns with the first group during the whole day. They would sit and listen to the trial in an adjacent room, ready to replace

anyone or the three of the first group in case the interpreters in the first group could not continue working. The third group was at rest and needed not to work on that day. The first and the second group working in the court would take turns every one hour and twenty-five minutes, with a ten-minute break. Each working day was divided into four sessions: morning, noon, afternoon and evening.

The proceedings of the Nuremberg war crime trials not only give information on the origin of simultaneous interpretation but also show how simultaneous interpreters worked in teams between 1945 and 1946. This is more evidence that working in teams is nothing new. It was born with simultaneous interpreting. Hiring a team of interpreters to help each other and take turns to ensure interpreting quality has been part of simultaneous interpreting for more than seventy years.

In a study of the role of interpreting partners, Chmiel (2008) sent out online questionnaires to 1,000 interpreters associated with AIIC via email to examine their expectations about assistance from their booth partners. About twenty per cent or 200 questionnaires were returned. The findings indicate that most interpreters expect their partners first of all to search the document they need, followed by writing

down numbers and supplying terms missing in the active interpreter's output respectively.

Fifty-seven per cent of the respondents had positive opinion towards their boothmates' pointing out their mistakes, which means that most interpreters expect their partners to give feedback on their performance, while nine per cent responded they did not expect that type of assistance. It is interesting to note that helping interpreting partners by letting them know of their own mistakes, such as misunderstanding the speaker or saying something wrong unintentionally is a sensitive issue in the profession. Whether it is okay to do so depends on each interpreter's attitude.

One finding that might be contrary to what is generally expected indicates that when off-mike, forty-five per cent of the respondents would go out of the booth, leaving their partner working alone, during which time no assistance could be provided. Some respondents gave additional explanation that in easy conferences no assistance would be needed by the active interpreters, while in highly difficult conferences having another interpreter by one's side is of no help at all and could even be a distraction. Sometimes the active interpreters need to focus so much that they prefer to be left alone.

Another respondent indicated that interpreters in Paris usually leave their partners alone as the work pace is so fast that assistance between boothmates is almost impossible. By the time one finishes writing down something, three sentences have passed. Most interpreters, however, can handle the situation without any help from their colleagues.

In addition to the booth behaviors of interpreters, Chmiel also asked about the respondents' opinion whether turn-taking and cooperation between boothmates should be taught in interpreting courses. Eighty-one per cent of the respondents answered that turn-taking should be taught, while ninety-two per cent answered that cooperation should be taught in interpreting courses.

By analyzing the responses obtained from the questionnaires, Chmiel concluded that although most interpreters are willing to assist their booth colleagues and expect some assistance, particularly by writing down numbers or searching for relevant documents, an indiscreet offer of help from an off-mike colleague may be counterproductive with regards to the quality of interpretation as it can cause the active interpreter to lose focus. Thus, one should be careful about how to offer assistance in the booth.

As discussed in Chmiel's article, the norm in the American market is different from certain markets as regards to booth presence of off-mike interpreters (p. 271). Thus, it is fair to assume that Thai interpreters may have a different working culture and expectations from those included in Chmiel's survey. In the present study, we would like to explore these issues from Thai interpreters' perspective so that the findings can be guidelines for Thai interpreters, especially for those who are new to the profession.

3. Research Methodology

In order to find out what role is expected from the off-mike interpreter and how to offer assistance to booth partners without disturbing the concentration of the active interpreter, we employed three different methods in the present study:

3.1. Observation

Cooperation was asked of four students in the M.A. in the Interpretation Program, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok. The four participants worked in two booths, two persons in each, interpreting a twenty-minute video clip, totaling 4,000 words, with an average speed of 200 words per minutes. In the video clip, there were several mentions of proper names and

numbers, dates, specialized terminology regarding malign tumors and cancer. We observed what the interpreters did in the booth through the glass pane of the booth and listened to the interpretation through the headsets.

We chose to conduct this experiment after the participants had been doing simultaneous interpreting more than two hours earlier in the day (during their classroom lesson and in a different experiment conducted by one of their classmates), in order to imitate a real normal working day of conference interpreters and not just a twenty-minute short session.

3.2 In-depth interview

After the simulated conference interpretation in the first part of the study, we interviewed the four participants. We asked them to bring the notes and other documents or tools they had used during the experiment and asked them to explain what they did in the booth when off-mike. We also asked what were the things done by their inactive partner that they found useful. In addition, we asked them to circle the words written down by their partners which had actually helped them in their interpretation.

3.3 Questionnaire

Thirty-five questionnaires were returned out of sixty-five sent out to Thai conference interpreters who had simultaneous interpreting experience in at least five assignments. Most questionnaires were sent by email, while a few were administered through telephone call. The questionnaire contained two parts. The first part asked about the working behavior and assistance they provide to their partners when they are off-mike. The second asked about their expectations, when they are active, towards their off-mike partners. Both parts contained the same list of activities and the same six labeled response categories, which included the following answering options: always, very often, often, sometimes, rarely, never. In the statistical analysis, we attributed values from 0 to 5 to the answer categories: 0 = never, 1 = rarely, 2 = sometimes, 3 = often, 4 = very often and 5 = always. We then calculated the percentage scores by dividing the sum of the answers by the maximum possible sum.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Experiment with student interpreters

From the observation, the interpreting students brought paper and pens into the booth and had laptop computers and smart phones for searching for terms. When the experiment started, the active interpreters started working as if they were working alone and paid no attention to their partners, while the off-mike participants listened and sometimes took notes on a piece of paper in front of them, without passing it to their booth partners.

By listening to the interpretation through the headsets, we observed that the rendition was not totally smooth. As the speaker in the video clip was fast and the subject matter complex, it was impossible to cover all the details. Although the student interpreters struggled at times and skipped some important words or sentences, the off-mike partners showed no signs of trying to help or supply information to the active participants when they were stuck. On the other hand, the active interpreters did not glance at the words their partners wrote down on the paper. Each interpreter, active or passive, focused mainly on listening and paid no attention to their partners.

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Afterwards, during the interviews, when asked what they did to enhance interpretation quality, all said that the most important thing is listening. About sixty per cent of their attention was directed to listening to the speaker and forty per cent to listening to their active partners. They did so in order to comprehend the subject matter of the video clip which would help them when they had to take their turn and interpret. Writing down terms, finding out their meanings and looking up what abbreviations or acronyms stand for are a secondary priority.

From the observation, about five minutes after the experiment started, the active interpreters started glancing at the notes taken by their partners and sometimes looking at their partners and nodding as if checking whether they had understood the speaker correctly. The off-mike participants did not give an obvious response. No gesturing, speaking or pointing, only writing down terms on the paper or underlining key words that had been written down for their partners. During the interview, the participants explained that they underlined words that they wanted to show to their partners. In most cases in interpreting, the key terms are repeated on several occasions. Writing down key terms so that they can point to them or underline them to

show their partners will help their partners follow the speaker more quickly.

Sometimes we observed that the off-mike participants looked up terms on their computers or smart phones and wrote them down on a piece of paper and placed it on the desk in front of them so their partners could look at it when they needed. They did not try to push the notes in front of their partners or try to attract their partners' attention. Both teams worked as if they were under the same rule of non-disturbance. During the interview, we asked them what they would do to warn their partners of their mistakes under this non-disturbance rule. Some participants suggested that they should write the term down or underline the term on the paper to let their partners know that those are the correct terms. But if it is already too late to incorporate the term in the active interpreter's output, they will just let that pass because there is no use telling them of their mistakes and it will only be distractive to their partners. Others suggested they should write down all the terms that they feel their partners got wrong but would not push it forward. Their partners would look at the note when they are in doubt.

On the other hand, when asked how they would ask their partners for help if they were in doubt or did not know a term, one student said there was one time during the experiment she did not understand the speaker so she wrote down the word she heard and passed it to her partner. Then her partner returned it with a suggested translation. But it depended on the situation whether she could make use of that word, adding it to her translation. Another student interpreter recounted that she wasn't sure of what she had heard and turned to her partner for help. Her partner already had that word written down on paper so when she saw that it was the word she thought she had heard, she could continue interpreting with confidence. In that case, the partner was a real help.

With regards to turn-taking, one team of student interpreters took turns after ten minutes. The other took turns every seven minutes. When asked why the turn-taking went that way, all answered that they would take turns after an agreed period of time, not because they felt tired or could not handle it. They could have worked for a longer time but from their experience they would take turn after some time in order to share the workload.

When asked about what they wrote down, the participants explained that they mostly wrote down numbers and dates, followed by terms and proper names. Sometimes they wrote the translation of a term or word as an alternative to what their partner was using. When the speaker gave a list of things, the off-mike students would write it down so their partners could take a look to see if they missed any items on the list.

On the other hand, when we asked the participants to circle the items, out of many that their partners had written down, which actually helped them while they were interpreting, only one tenth of what had been written was found to be of actual help. However, when asked whether it would be a good idea to write things down only when help is asked for in order not to work too hard during the off-mike period, they said no because it would not come in time after help is solicited. The written down terms could come in handy later when they get repeated and they would not have to be written again. They can just be underlined or passed to the partner in need of help.

When asked whether there were any other ways of providing help apart from writing down notes, the participants suggested that this way of providing help is the

best way, because gesturing can be confusing and distracting, whereas pointing at the monitor could also disturb the active interpreter's focus. In addition, if the slide has changed, the active interpreter will not understand what their colleague wants to say. Therefore, writing things down on paper is the best way, in their opinion, as it is least intrusive and the notes can be consulted when the need arises. Sometimes the written down terms can be useful in more than one occasion.

When asked what kind of partner has the most detrimental effect on quality of interpreting, some answered those who show no willingness to help, for example, not listening to the speaker, leaving the booth, or sleeping in the booth. Working with this kind of partner is frustrating and undesirable. Others suggested that those offering help in an intrusive manner could also be a problem, for example those who tried to attract their attention by touching them or tried too hard to help. Actually, by just holding a note to their face when they are interpreting is considered intrusive as it distracts them away from what they are doing.

We can conclude from our observation and interview that working in a team and taking turns is an effective way of handling fatigue and writing down numbers

and terms is a good way of communication and offering assistance as it does not disturb the active interpreter's focus.

4.2 Questionnaire

The thirty-five completed questionnaires on interpreters' booth behavior and expectations towards booth partners show interesting results. Table 1 shows what our respondents do in the booth when they are not active.

Table 1 : Interpreters' off-mike activities

Activities	Percentage score
Listening to speaker	88.6
Listening to partner	81.2
Writing down numbers, dates, terms	72.6
Looking up vocabulary/acronyms	66.2
Offering to take their turn after agreed period of time	65.2
Writing down suggested translation for partner	62.0
Offering to take their turn when partner struggles	61.2
Going through materials for next speech	58.8
Warning partner of his/her mistakes	54.2
Leaving booth	19.4

It comes as no surprise that the activity the interpreters do the most when off-mike is listening to the speaker, followed by listening to their partners' interpretation, writing numbers, dates, and terms, finding the meaning of abbreviations and terms, offering to take their turn after an agreed period of time, writing down a suggested translation of a word for their partners, offering to take their turn when their partners struggle, going through materials for the next speech and warning their partners of their mistakes. As for the question about their leaving the booth while their partners are interpreting, 43% of the respondents answered "never," while 54% answered rarely or sometimes, only one respondent (3%) said he/she always leaves the booth but further explained that he/she does so to take phone calls or to go to the restroom. It does not mean he/she is outside the booth all the time that he/she is off-mike. We can conclude that most Thai interpreters think they should be in the booth at all times even when it is their partners' turn to interpret. They should not leave their partners working alone in the booth.

The second part of the questionnaire asked about the respondents' expectations towards their off-mike booth partners. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 : Expectation towards off-mike partners

Activities	Percentage score
Listening to speaker	81.2
Offering to take their turn after some time	80.0
Warning partner of his/her mistakes	78.2
Offering to take their turn when partner struggles	76.6
Listening to partner	72.6
Writing down numbers, dates, terms	72.6
Looking up vocabulary/acronyms	69.8
Writing down suggested translation for partner	66.2
Going through materials for next speech	57.8
Leaving booth	28.6

The activity they expect most of the time from their off-mike partners is listening to the speaker, followed closely by offering to take their turn after some time, then by pointing out their mistakes, offering to take their turn when they struggle, listening to them, writing down numbers, dates and terms, finding the meaning of vocabulary/acronyms, writing down a suggested translation of a word for them, and going

through materials for the next speech. They expect their partner to rarely leave the booth.

In sensitive issues like pointing out partners' mistakes, in the first part of the questionnaire, only 11% of the respondents said they always do so while in the second part 51% expected their partners to point out their mistakes and no one answered they never expect their partners to do so. It can be concluded that interpreters expect this assistance more than they have the courage to give it.

Another interesting answer is about leaving the booth. While most interpreters expect their partners to stay in the booth (29% answered they expect their partner to never leave the booth while 60% expect them to do so only rarely or sometimes), some said they want them to always leave the booth. They further explained that as freelance interpreters they do not expect much from their partners. If their boothmates are not willing to help or leave the booth when off-mike, they have to handle the shift by themselves. However, that is only a minority answer as most respondents answered negatively towards leaving the booth when off-mike.

We can conclude that interpreters do expect some assistance from their booth partners, especially when they

make mistakes and when they struggle. They also expect their partners' constant presence in the booth. However, they are afraid of distracting or disturbing their partners and do not offer help as much as they expect it.

5. Conclusion

Having more than one interpreter working in the booth can significantly help increase the quality of interpretation, as the passive interpreter can help listen to the speaker and the active interpreter and detect and help correct the mistakes, help with looking up terms in the dictionary or internet and pass on the information by writing it down on paper. Taking over when the active interpreter gets stuck or struggles makes the interpretation smoother and more accurate.

Writing assistance down on paper is a good way of in-booth communication where silence is required when one interpreter is speaking into the microphone. Apart from not interrupting or distracting the active interpreter, it is very helpful as the terms on a note can be looked at several times and it is a clearer way of communication than gesturing or pointing on the screen.

Although Thai interpreters have negative views about booth partners who are too intrusive and disturb their concentration, most of

them expect their partners to stay with them in the booth, as the survey clearly shows they expect their partner to rarely leave the booth and that they themselves would rarely do so.

This study confirms the findings of Chmiel (2008) that the assistance needed from booth partners should not be distracting and most interpreters want their partners to warn them when they make mistakes. It is also in line with Jensen (2006)'s result from the American market with regards to expected constant presence in the booth and is contradictory to Chmiel's findings that in some markets, e.g. Paris, it is the norm for the passive interpreters to leave the active partners alone in the booth.

Although this study attempted to employ different research methods, from observation in a simulated setting to in-depth interview and to survey of a bigger group of interpreters, it was still limited by the small sample size due to time and logistic constraints. Future studies may want to observe how professional interpreters work in real settings and conduct in-depth interview with them as well.

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