



## THE PHENOMENOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF A CONSECUTIVELY INTERPRETED TEXT

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### 1. Introduction

In the world of science and technology, in the age of globalization and international communication interpreting services become crucial. Since ancient times the interpreter's profession has been viewed as demanding and challenging; interpreters have been treated with mistrust and suspicion because their listeners could not verify the correctness of their rendering. Now it is emphasized that interpreting the oral text is an intrinsically difficult exercise because of its spontaneity, high cognitive load and the requirement for a high standard of accuracy.

Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies briefly defines the consecutive interpreter's role: "In consecutive interpreting the interpreter listens to a speech segment for a few minutes or so, takes notes, and then delivers the whole segment in the target language" (Baker and Malmkjaer 1998, 41). A skilful interpreter is expected to have a good short-term memory to retain what s/he has just heard and a good long-term memory to put the information into context. According to Morin (2005, 4), "a critical phase for the interpreter is to make a self-assessment of what he has just experienced while on stage for the purpose of performing better in a future interpreting assignment" (cited from Čirvinskienė 2007, 6).

Basically, the phenomenon of consecutive interpreting has been investigated in various aspects by Rozan (1956), who distinguished the main note-taking principles, Baker (2001), Seleskovitch (1999) and Gile (1995) who identified the differences between consecutive and simultaneous interpreting modes, Sofer (2006) who determined the peculiarities of consecutive interpreting and its types, Nida (1964) who proposed the consecutive translation strategies, Leis (2005) who investigated the inadequacies of interpreting. Relatively high frequency of errors and omissions in the interpreting process revealed the growth of significance of self-reflection in the interpreting paradigm. "Self-reflection" can be understood as activity in which peo-



ple recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it” (Boud, Keogh and Walker 1985, 19). The application of reflective analysis as a method of self-assessment and the means for identification of personal linguistic strategies of consecutive interpreting is a novelty in the realm of translation science.

## 2. Research methodology

The investigation was conducted with a group of the fourth-year students of English Philology at the Faculty of Humanities, Šiauliai University. Four students were asked to participate in the study. For all the informants English was the first foreign language. Their level of English could be defined as upper intermediate. The experiment of consecutive interpreting was a rather new activity having in mind that students did not have any consecutive interpreting practice during their studies at Šiauliai University. They were supposed to interpret an unknown English text (the upper intermediate level), which was read to them in segments. The chosen text is entitled “Did you hear about?” It is a scientific article about the evolution of language and gossip in our life. It was chosen because the topic is not too elaborate and is relevant to the students of English philology. There were no special scientific terms or absolutely unfamiliar phrases or ideas.

The text is an extract from *The Irish Times*, it was published in *Landmark* by Haines and Stewart (2000, 118). The informants’ consecutive interpreting of the text was video-recorded. The length of the interpretation, i.e. the video-recording lasted from 10 to 17 minutes, depending on the informant’s capacities. The video-recording was necessary for the phenomenographical research and for the informants’ self-reflection. To cite Čirvinskienė: “Reflective thinking (...) is a thorough consideration of all of one’s thoughts, the implications of one’s frame of reference on those thoughts, and all alternatives to one’s thoughts” (2007, 35).

**Phenomenography** as a research approach “(...) uses qualitative rather than quantitative data, and its output is categories of experience (...)” Laurillard (1993, 69). This approach was developed in 1979 in Sweden. To quote Marton and Booth: “In phenomenography individuals are seen as the bearers of different ways of experiencing a phenomenon” (1997, 114). Each phenomenon, issue or concept can be understood and perceived differently by each individual. “The subject of phenomenographical investigation is the relations between human beings and the world. Phenomenography investigates qualitatively different ways of gaining experience and means of perception” (Baranauskienė 2003, 67). Additionally, phenomenography does not seek to distinguish individual experience and its delivery as correct or incorrect; it is concerned with the apprehension despite its correctness or incorrectness. Thus, this research method is suitable for the investigation of different interpreting experiences among the students of English Philology, because I aimed at analysing their personal experience on consecutive interpreting task in general. All four informants were asked to comment upon their experience and the filmed sequences right after they finished the consecutive interpreting. To be more precise, they were asked

to reflect on their interpreting, to name the strategies they used, which enabled them to cope with the emerging problems and to explain their feelings. The informants had to concentrate on the following questions: *a) what is your self-assessment? b) what strategies did you use? c) did you notice any mistakes?* Their comments were not restricted by time or by length. The informants could choose any segment to make comments on.

The reflections were tape-recorded and later transcribed for the purpose of the analysis of the material. Subsequently, the empirical investigation is based on the semantic analysis of the self-reflections and on the phenomenographic analysis that is dialectical in the sense that meanings and categories are developed in the process of bringing quotes together, comparing them and arranging them into categories. The categories were not defined before-hand, they became clear only in the process of dialectical and semantic analysis of the transcribed text.

### 3. Research findings

The quotations of the informants' self-reflection enabled me to determine the categories. Similarly, the quotes were used in order to exemplify those categories.

The material of the reflection of the informants was studied whereupon the quotes of the participants were distinguished into separate categories according to the different modes of thinking.

The variety of categories was discovered throughout the research whilst comparing and accentuating dissimilarities. The semantically related words allowed the quotes to be grouped. Over 20 sequences were commented by the students. The total number of the quotes (the segments commented by the informants further will be called "quotes"). To sum up, 95 quotes were tape-recorded.

The recorded quotes were attributed to the following qualitative categories: **1) cognition, 2) linguistic strategies, 3) errors, 4) self-reflection, 5) emotional background, 6) future improvement.** In this article I will constrict myself to three basic categories: cognition, linguistic strategies and errors.

#### 3.1. Thinking Oriented towards Cognition

The term "cognition" (Latin: *cognoscere*, "to know") has to be defined. To cite Bijsman: "*Cognition* refers to all the functions of the brain that contribute to human knowledge, such as attention, memory and association" (Fahlbusch, Bromiley and Barret 1999, 603). Speech in such a perspective is treated as an individual function determining some special outcomes. "Cognition covers a range of mental activities such as paying attention, learning and remembering, listening, speaking, thinking" (Lloyd and Turner 1995, 2). ***The language in the quotes is authentic.***



Table 1

### Thinking oriented towards cognition

<i>'I couldn't translate some main words which were met in all the text', 'Some sentences were too long and I couldn't remember even the beginning', 'I didn't know what to expect from the text', 'I didn't understand the main idea', 'It was hard to form the correct Lithuanian sentence' etc. (Informant 1; 15 quotes)</i>
<i>'It was difficult to remember the beginning of the sentence', 'I could not concentrate', 'When I misunderstood a word I tried to avoid it and translated only the main information'; (Informant 2; 3 quotes)</i>
<i>'I didn't concentrate as much as I could', 'I knew it's not a job, just some help, so, I didn't concentrate', 'I translated like that just naturally without thinking too much', etc. (Informant 3; 5 quotes)</i>
<i>'I was not so concentrated', 'When you're writing you have to concentrate on the grammar and so on', 'When I was listening to the English sentence I was concentrated', 'When there was a sentence which I didn't understand', 'I was too concentrated on the beginning of the sentence', etc. (Informant 4; 10 quotes)</i>
Total amount of quotes: 33

All the participants of the study rather willingly commented upon their cognitive experience. Students frequently emphasized the negative experience, e.g. the insufficient vocabulary, the inability to concentrate, the sentences in the source-language seemed to be too long to remember, the lack of practical experience, the incompetence to take advantage of note-taking. They could not conceal their agitation and inability to concentrate.

### 3.2. Thinking Oriented towards Linguistic Strategies

To begin with, a strategy is a plan or a method for obtaining a certain goal. Collin's Dictionary describes strategy as "a long-term plan for success, especially in politics, business and war" (Maurik 1999, 3). In this study a great consideration was allocated to the linguistic strategies, employed by the English Philology students during the experiment.

The informants commented on the changes they implemented during the interpreting process: the words they did not remember, some meanings (or the whole ideas) they did not understand at all, how they shortened or expanded the message and why. Thus, naturally, they employed some translation strategies to cope with the shortcomings of their knowledge. The students named the following strategies: **omission, paraphrasing, note-taking**. No informant named the *addition* or *direct interpreting* strategies although they were employing them in their performance. The list of quotes oriented towards translation strategies is provided below:

Table 2

### Thinking oriented towards translation strategies

<i>'So, I just omitted some phrases', 'I was writing down some points', 'I didn't even finish two or three sentences', 'I omitted too many words', 'When I didn't know the word I usually omitted it or tried to give some similar meaning'; (Informant 1; 5 quotes)</i>
<i>'I did not take any notes', 'I skipped the words which I didn't know, for example, "nitty-gritty matters"', 'I tried to paraphrase and to say something in other words'; (Informant 2; 3 quotes)</i>
<i>'When you are writing, you are concentrated on writing but not on translating', 'At first, when I tried to write something down, it disturbed me', 'It is not possible to remember everything without putting it down', 'The essential things should be note-taken', 'I didn't translate it at all'; (Informant 3; 5 quotes)</i>
<i>'Well, I made a lot of gaps', 'Writing took some part of my attention', 'For me note-taking had no use really', 'I understand several words in those sentences, so, I just tried to explain it according to the meaning of the whole text', 'In order to use scientific language very often I used the word "aspektas"; (Informant 4; 5 quotes)</i>
In total: 18 quotes

Almost all the informants emphasized the complexity of *note taking*, because of the lack of skills and practice. The main problem was that students did not know how to shorten words or whether to shorten them at all. Moreover, their attention was split while listening and sticking to the rules of grammar.

When the students encountered a new or unknown word, when the idea or a part of it was not clear, they simply tried to skip the information. While self-reflecting they noticed that omission was used rather frequently, but it reduced the quality of the interpreting. Sometimes a good translation/interpreting can omit some information from the source-text. Nida (2003) states: "Of all the adjustments which may be made by translators in their adaptation of a source text to a target language, it is perhaps the omissions of extraneous elements that most often goes undetected" (cited from Shepherd (2004, 35). Thus, this strategy is rather well noticed.

The less popular, but also willingly used strategy proved to be paraphrasing. The most paraphrased word was "grooming", which was rather important in the text, because it referred to the "monkeys' means of communication".

Informants commented the usage of omission six times, while the usage of paraphrasing was discussed four times. Frequent employment of omission reveals that the students were in a hurry and did not try to produce as much information as possible from the source-text. Additionally, they preferred not to speak about the things they didn't understand themselves. Also they felt uncomfortable when they encountered an unknown word, i.e. the insufficient vocabulary reduced their self-confidence as interpreters.



### 3.3. Thinking oriented towards errors

Ricks claims that “there are three basic categories of translation errors: *simple carelessness, multiple-meaning words and idioms*” (1999, 77). Most often mistakes emerge due to carelessness. This case also appeared in the informants’ performance. Therefore, the students admitted that they could not be attentive enough and to concentrate properly. Consequently, their mistakes proved to be conditioned by the lack of interpreting practice and inability to perceive multi-meaning words or phrases. The source-text that the informants had to interpret did not contain many multi-meaning words. However, Informant 2 interpreted the phrase “*whether it is good or bad*” -> “*ar oras geras, ar blogas*” (if the weather is good or bad). If the interpreter is not attentive enough, it is more likely that s/he might misinterpret the multi-meaning words or certain phrases or homophones. Furthermore, Nierenberg (1996) suggests that recognition is one of the ways to cope with the unknown words or concepts, the errors cannot be corrected if they are not revealed and acknowledged, e.g. if the interpreter is not sure or has misheard something, he should ask to repeat or even explain it briefly. All the informants used this strategy, but it did not help them in most cases.

Unfortunately, students themselves could hardly notice their mistakes even while watching and reflecting on their performance. Only Informant 1 admitted that she has made a mistake while interpreting the fragment “*whether it’s a good or bad thing*” into “*geras ar blogas oras*”, she herself stated that it should have been interpreted as “*ar tai gerai ar blogai*”.

Table 3

Thinking oriented towards errors of translation

Source-language	Target-language
‘ <i>Language is our greatest treasure as a species, and what do we <u>habitually</u> do with it?</i> ’	‘ <i>Kalba yra mūsų didžiausias kaip žmonijos turtas, kaipgi mes vertiname tą kalbą?</i> ’ (Informant 1) (Gloss: Language is the greatest treasure of humankind; and how do we appreciate our language?).
‘ <i>Two-thirds of human conversation is taken up <u>not with discussions of the cultural or political problems of the day</u></i> ’	‘ <i>Du trečdaliai žmonių pokalbių yra ne apie kažką, o apie politiką.</i> ’ (Informant 3) (Gloss: Two-thirds of human conversations are not just about something, but about politics).
‘ <i>and <u>whether it’s a good or a bad thing</u></i> ’	‘ <i>ar oras geras, ar blogas</i> ’ (Informant 2) (Gloss: Is the weather good or bad).
‘ <i>Dunbar <u>rejects</u></i> ’	‘ <i>Dunbar teigia</i> ’ (Informant 1) (Gloss: Dunbar states).
‘ <i>Instead he suggests</i> ’	‘ <i>Taip pat jis sako</i> ’ (Informant 1) (Gloss: He also says)
‘ <i>Instead he suggests</i> ’	‘ <i>Taip pat jis teigia</i> ’ (Informant 2) (Gloss: He also claims).
‘ <i>We don’t spend two-thirds of our <u>time gossiping just because we can talk</u></i> ’	‘ <i>Du trečdalius mūsų laiko mes ne plepame, o kalbame</i> ’ (Informant 3) (Gloss: Two-thirds of our time we don’t chat, we talk).



The method of self-reflection is commonly used in order to perform the interpreting, to observe it, to watch one's own performance, to notice the shortcomings and mistakes, to comment, and of course, to learn from one's own errors. In this investigation informants did not notice many mistakes concerning the translation, but still they commented at least on some.

One of the drawbacks was the incapability to focus. Nerienberg (1996) names the enemies of concentration:

- 1) *haste* – if one is in a rush, it is natural that s/he makes more mistakes;
- 2) *fatigue* – tiredness makes it difficult to keep the mind focused. Moreover, it not only makes interpreters perform more slowly, but also detracts from accuracy and alertness;
- 3) *boredom* – it reduces the sense of motivation to concentrate. The interpreter is apt to implement his/her performance as quickly as possible;
- 4) *distraction* – the withdrawal of the attention from one object of attention to the other object of distraction.

#### 4. Conclusive remarks

Consecutive interpreting has become a cross-disciplinary phenomenon. It shares information with other disciplines such as cognitive sciences, neuropsychology, and linguistics. The whole process of consecutive interpreting can be broken into three stages: understanding, analysing and re-expressing. The strategies of consecutive interpreting basically are divided into: before stepping-on stage (memory skills, social strategies, cognitive strategies), while-on stage (affective, compensation, note-taking strategies), and after-performing interpreting task stage (metacognitive strategies, self-reflection). The phenomenographical research of the process and product of consecutive interpreting proves that self-assessment serves as a precondition for the synthesis of translation theory and practice, enhancement of ones' linguistic translation strategies of consecutive interpreting and the development of reflective thinking skills.

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## FENOMENOGRAFINĖ NUOSEKLIJŲ VERČIAMO TEKSTO ANALIZĖ

### Santrauka

**Pagrindiniai žodžiai:** nuoseklūs vertimas, vertimo strategijos, reflektvyvių analizė, fenomenografija.

Šio straipsnio tikslas – ištirti vertėjo žodžių savirefleksijos procesą ir rezultatus, identifikuojantį lingvistines vertimo žodžių strategijas, kognityvinius vertėjo procesus bei neišvengiamai pasitaikančias klaidas. Svarbi vertimo žodžių dalis yra savirefleksijos procesas, įgalinantis vertėją atkurti, apmąstyti ir įvertinti atliktą darbą, išvelgti savo silpnąsias ir stipriąsias puses bei kito vertimo proceso metu išvengti klaidų ir nuolat tobulėti. Fenomenografinis nuoseklūs vertimo metodas patvirtino, kad anglų filologijos ketvirto kurso studentų mąstymas yra nukreiptas ne tik į strategijas, bet ir į žinias, gebėjimus, klaidų priežastis bei savianalizę. Dažniausiai naudojamos kompensacinės vertimo strategijos, iš kurių – praleidimo strategiją sudaro 34%, ir perifrazė – 28%.





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**Summary**

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This study aims at the investigation of the process and results of self-reflection in the consecutive interpreting that allows identifying a variety of linguistic and cognitive translation strategies. Self-reflection is a significant part of consecutive interpreting. It empowers the interpreter to reconstruct, to think over and to assess the results of interpreting as well as to get a deeper insight into the strengths and weaknesses of their personal interpreting, to avoid errors and to constantly seek the improvement. The phenomenographical method of investigation in the context of the consecutive interpreting allows making a claim that the fourth year students of English Philology orient their thinking not only towards linguistic translation strategies, but also towards their linguistic knowledge, skills, reasons for making errors and self-analysis. The most common translation strategies are of compensatory nature: omission constitutes 34% and paraphrase 28%.

