

Teaching and Learning Simultaneous Interpreting at Kurdistan Region Universities: Challenges and Strategies

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ABSTRACT: Simultaneous Interpreting (SI henceforth) is a mode of oral translation which plays an important role in the realm of translation. SI is unlike written translation where the prior is more difficult when it comes to practice in the field. Moreover, SI is an exclusive skill which requires more than an ability to speak many languages. It is a process that leads people to communicate directly across cultural boundaries. The key problem is how to mitigate or overcome SI obstacles. This problematic area is going to be investigated in this study. The main aim of this study is to highlight the key challenges and problems facing the process of teaching and learning SI, then to find out strategies to address all the challenges of teaching and learning SI that instructors and students are currently facing. This study hypothesizes that having neither facilities nor well-trained teachers pose problems for teaching and learning SI at the Departments of Translation; students are troubled by learning SI at translation departments since there are many obstacles; and teachers struggling with having no equipment, deficiency in student's level, and many other problems. The findings of this study revealed a number of obstacles that are addressed by students and instructors. Then some suitable solutions are raised to either mitigate or overcome them. The conclusions verified the validity of the hypotheses of the present study and ended up with a number of conclusions and recommendations.

Keywords: simultaneous interpreting, challenges, strategies, problems and obstacles, solutions and recommendations.

1. Introduction

In recent years, a great deal of interest in Simultaneous Interpreting (SI henceforth) has been shown. The main concern for any interpreter is to do the interpretation in labs and to have all needed facilities. However, it has been long time Kurdistan region universities are suffering from the lack of labs, facilities, and well-trained teachers. Currently, there are no data on addressing SI obstacles. The SI subject is considered useless and not helpful for the students of translation departments as they lack interpretation tools at the departments. Teachers are in trouble and they are really confused on how to teach SI without having neither facilities nor well-trained teachers. Therefore, the key problems are how to bridge this gap and overcome such obstacles. To investigate these problems, the following questions are addressed:

1. What are the biggest obstacles that students of translation departments face in the SI class?
2. Is it useful to investigate students' struggles of SI?
3. To what extent the students' and the teacher's provided solutions are useful and helpful in belittling the obstacles?
4. Does the lack of tools of SI slack the progress of the students' performance in SI?

Generally, SI is considered to be one of the most difficult modes that interpreters may face as the original message, Source Language (SL) should be carried into the Target Language (TL) simultaneously and stuffed with the least imaginable bit of emotion and with very specific and intended syntactic and lexical means. This research aims at giving a general introduction to SI, highlighting the main challenges and problems facing the process of teaching and learning SI at Kurdistan region universities, finding out strategies to address all the challenges of teaching and learning SI that teachers and students are currently facing in their departments, and investigating any differences or similarities in the type of challenges facing both governmental and private universities in terms of teaching and learning SI.

This study is limited to teachers and students from a number of governmental and private universities including the University of Duhok, Nawroz University, Cihan University, and University of Sulaymaniyah. Also, the study is limited to simultaneous, not consecutive, interpreting.

The model adapted for analyzing the data in this study is a selective one. This study is based on feedback, through a questionnaire, obtained from students and instructors as well as observations, through interviews, with independent evaluators.

The purpose of this study is to serve Translation Departments in general and teachers in particular by realizing many methods and strategies for them so as to overcome these problems or mitigate them. Accordingly, it is hoped that all departments of translation fill their gap in terms of teaching SI. The study also aims to be helpful for students at translation departments as they can benefit from the strategies of SI learning that are discussed in the study.

2. What is Simultaneous Interpreting?

SI is a process which leads people to communicate directly across cultural boundaries and languages by using specialized technology, as well as professional interpreters who are trained to listen to one language while speaking the other one in the meantime simultaneously (Ghaza'ee & Ali, 2019, p.273). SI usually needs more than one interpreter because firstly this is an exhausting work which requires a team that consists of 2-3 interpreters, each booth will take turn every 20-30 minutes; secondly because the interpreter whose mike is off can almost help his/her partner in order to find text, documents, write names and numbers, use glossary and find terms; thirdly the team's duty is to share all documents and information (Setton & Dawrant, 2016, p.254). The interpreter can only have brief access to the discourse but more direct context experience of its reception and also usually more recognizable audience. At least, interpreters must have available adequate words directly, that aims to what they say and how they say it which is not for lengthy support in different places and times but different people, hence to give listeners the access to relate meanings that are in the context of what they see, know, and what was said before and after. Such conditions differ from each other, in some situations interpreters might rely on texts or might have fewer signs than translators who can get intentions of the author, or to the audience's nature and its reactions for instance in media interpreting. In the end, translators and interpreters are absolutely in two different situations with different resources, by using different skills and techniques which aim at different outcomes suited to different media communication (Setton & Dawrant, 2016, p.8). SI is divided into four different stages (Hendricks 1971, cited in Al-Khanji et al., 2000, p.550):

1. Listening, i.e., sound perception.
2. Comprehension, i.e., to grasping sound senses.
3. Translation, i.e., to transfer the senses into conforming units of linguistics or into another language.
4. Phonation, i.e., uttering, making the new utterance of the speech.

2.1 Strategies in Simultaneous Interpreting

There is a list of comprehensive strategies which are suggested by Gile (1995) and they are called "copying tactics" which he claimed are important for practical work of interpreters (p.191). Gile's coping tactics are characterized into three different tactics: comprehension tactics, preventive tactics, and reformulation tactics (Gile, 1995, p.201). Chang and Schallert (2007) summarized all strategies that are frequently used by interpreters in SI, including "anticipation, generalization, simplification, summarizing, paraphrasing, omission, reformulation, chunking, maintaining a comfortable EVS (Ear Voice Span" (p.140).

Simultaneous interpreters should ensure the accuracy of live interpreting and some ways to train themselves. It is better that the interpreter gets benefit of speaker script, and they have to render it in order to get ready in advance and understand the whole script contexts (Lee 2006, as cited in Trisnawati & Netta, 2020, p.68). Moreover, the interpreter must not offer a long time for a sentence/phrase by asking for alternatives. The interpreter should have an idea of the speaker's speech and should understand speeches very quickly to get better results. When doing SI, interpreters might select coping tactics which are specified by Gile (1995) that suit the challenging conditions (Trisnawati & Netta, 2020, p. 68).

Wu (2010, p.173) stated that there are many strategies which should be used and applied in SI, which are as follows:

- a. Do not be influenced by ST (Source Text)
- b. Do paraphrasing
- c. Use as simple expressions as possible
- d. Use number approximation
- e. During encountering difficulties, do correction and omission tactics
- f. Do summarizing
- g. Use visual aid
- h. Know how will you distribute efforts
- i. Use short EVS and sentence
- j. Use Pace/speed control

- k. Use more natural statement expressions
- l. Use the support of background knowledge
- m. Do anticipation (guessing)
- n. Do message filtering messages
- o. Keep up with the speaker
- p. Do time controlling
- q. Have good segmentation of meaning/sentences groups

According to Wu (2010, p.179), normally better strategies will lead to better interpretation outputs.

2.2 Teaching Simultaneous Interpreting

The schools and departments of interpreting mostly try to train students to listen carefully and understand different text types (Dollerup & Loddegaard, 1991, p.237). One of the main problems facing students is that their world knowledge is very limited, especially those students who are first year students of the 17- to 18-year-old students, as well as they find it very difficult to grasp the whole meaning of texts; they depend on words rather than learning how to process content. Due to that, there are some analytic strategies that are highly recommended to be used with students of interpreting departments (Dollerup & Loddegaard, 1991, p.273). Mainly, there are four interpreting techniques that should be taught correctly to students, which are Analysis, Memory, Text Linguistics, and Analysis Teaching Exercises. However, most interpreting scholars have stressed on memory and analysis because of their important role in learning (Dollerup & Loddegaard, 1991, p.273).

Mainly, in interpreting courses, students will be required to process the message content correctly (Dollerup & Loddegaard, 1991, p.238). They must take the text meaning so as to isolate the units of sense, to prevent involvement of anything only the importance in the message rendering. Students who can use the method are those who rely on strategies that are suitable for exercises on hand, yet there are poor tools in long run to do the task successfully. Additionally, the trainee interpreter views interpreting as being an act of the reproduction of text rather than a communicative act.

3. Challenges of Simultaneous Interpreting

Ghaza'ee and Ali stated that there are four linguistic problems, which are Grammatical, Lexical, Stylistic, and Phonological problems (2019, p. 276).

1. Grammatical Problems, which include complicated SL, different TL grammar, and different TL order.
2. Lexical problems, which include synonyms, idioms, literal translation, and terminologies that are very hard.
3. Stylistic problems, which include parallelism, ambiguity, simple vs. complex style, and formal vs. informal language.
4. Phonological problems, which include incorrect pronunciation, homophonic words, and sometimes unpleasant voice.

Additionally, the interpretation process does not only carry out linguistic problems but also non-linguistic ones. Non-linguistic obstacles include self-confidence, flexibility, punctuality, memorization skills, active listening, and lack of strength (Ghaza'ee & Ali, 2019, p.276).

Al-Maryani stated that there are many problems facing the departments of translation in terms of teaching SI (2019, p. 440). These problems include:

1. Students' number is very high in one class and this has led to not letting them participate in practices as required such as having 50 students in one class.
2. The time which is allocated for the course is not enough, for instance there are only 3 hours a week, which is a very short time for all students to participate in exercises.
3. Not having suitable equipment and setting, for instance not having sound-proof booths.
4. Problems in interpreting curriculum as there are only three interpreting courses that are taught in three different years. They are Sight Translation (2nd year), Consecutive Interpreting (3rd year), and Simultaneous Interpreting (4th year). Thus, the activities that should be covered in these different courses are unclear, such as teamworking, the activity of having a speaker and interpreter in the class, as well as teachers only teach selected texts or videos.
5. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research does not have an organized plan in order to train their instructors.
6. Not having professional trainers.

7. Students do not have a strong competence in English, which means students are not qualified enough in English so as to be able to confront English language problems, such as idioms, homophonic words, phonetics problem, long speeches, lack of knowledge, and international terms.
8. The courses are old-fashioned. They are neither improved nor revised.
9. Students have problems with the learning environment.
10. The departments do not have a suitable system when they accept students in the field. No placement tests are conducted.
11. Sometimes the revisors of the courses do not care about materials and activities that should be given to students.

The interpreter's work will be much harder through having the following external factors (Ghaza'ee & Ali, 2019, p.277).

- a. Being in small booths without having sufficient air.
- b. Very low light in booths.
- c. Not having the view or a poor view upon the conference room.
- d. Poor microphone speaker discipline.
- e. Reading from something that is not in the text for the interpreter.

4. Methodology, Participants, and Research Design

The methodological approach taken in this paper is a mixed method, i.e., a qualitative and quantitative approach have been used. The jury members of questionnaire and interview were experts who have good knowledge and experience in SI. They were selected from two universities as follows:

1. University of Duhok, College of Languages, Department of Translation.
2. University of Nawroz, College of Languages, Department of Translation.

And the members were five doctors who had roles as a jury committee for both the questionnaire and the interview. A questionnaire has been conducted for undergraduate students, in addition to an interview which is only for teachers who currently teach SI at the Departments of Translation at governmental and private universities in Kurdistan region. Four universities which are running translation departments have participated in this study; two universities are governmental and two others are non-governmental universities. The participants are divided into two groups; students and lecturers. Regarding students, from each university 10 students have participated; five males and five females from the fourth year of study because the SI module runs only in the fourth year. Hence, the total number of respondents to the questionnaire was 40 students. The questionnaire consists of 35 questions (See Appendix A). Students were asked to refer to those obstacles that have been faced. Concerning the qualitative method, an interview was conducted with teachers who are currently teaching SI at translation departments and who are aware of the SI condition. This section of research required respondents to give information on SI obstacles (See Appendix B). After collecting and analyzing the data, certain challenges and solutions will be found and included in this study. Highlighting problems and recommending solutions are to be presented and discussed. The SI strategies that are used by lecturers will be pointed out. The data will be analyzed depending on a selective model, which integrates Ghaza'ee and Ali's (2019) model difficulties of SI, suggested solutions and Al-Maryani's (2019) suggested solutions. In regards to the methods that are used, firstly in the students' questionnaire, there are some obstacles that have received high rates, some obstacles have received moderate rates and some others have received low rates, then some solutions were proposed by participants. Moreover, in the interview, some methods were raised by instructors and some solutions were suggested to those obstacles which have been faced.

5. Results

The obstacles that have received high rates of acceptance are obstacle 15 (SI idioms might be problematic) with the rate of 84%, obstacle 25 (lack of knowledge about the topic) estimated as 83%, obstacle 16 (lack of international terms such as shipping and trade terms) rated as 77%, obstacle 17 (new idioms and expressions while delivering the interpreting) rated as 75%, obstacle 33 (lack of communicative competence in English) and its rate was 75%, obstacle 35 (lack of professional training) rated as 75%, obstacle 6 (sound difficulties while interpreting) estimated as 75%, obstacle 2 (inaccurate pronunciation by the speaker) with the rate of 72%, obstacle 12 (weekly hours are not enough to learn) rated as 72%, obstacle 20 (long speeches) rated as 72%, obstacle 32 (cultural differences) rated as 72%, and obstacle 1 (non-professional speakers) estimated as 72%.

However, the obstacles that have received low rates of acceptance are obstacle 11 (the course is above students' level), which was rated as 35%, obstacle 23 (time and place are problematic) and its rate was 42%, obstacle 30 (inability to engage in team working) rated as 45%, obstacle 10 (instructors do not give the opportunity to the student to evaluate the course)

reaching 50%, obstacle 22 (long boring sentences) estimated as 50%, obstacle 8 (word order differences between SI and TL, the order of the words in SI differs from that in the TL) which received the rate of 50%, obstacle 28 (the questions raised up by the audience during interpreting) rated as 54%, obstacle 13 (the teaching method is theoretical which is not helpful for students) rated as 53%, obstacle 34 (the learning environment is not really helpful to learn) estimated as 52%, obstacle 14 (variety of religious concept) rated as 55%, obstacle 7 (when there is a native or a fluent speaker, it will affect the interpreting outcomes because the interpreter may not be a native one or may not get what the speaker has said) rated as 45%.

Moreover, the following obstacles represent the obstacles that have received intermediate rates of acceptance: obstacle 24 (lack of experience) with 70%, obstacle 29 (embarrassing situations such as dialect, pre-knowledge and intended meaning) with 69%, obstacle 26 (lack of SI equipment) rated as 67%, obstacle 27 (lack of SI syllabus) estimated as 67%, obstacle 5 (inability to catch up with the speaker during delivering the interpretation) and its rate was 62%, obstacle 18 (missing words during interpreting) estimated as 62%, obstacle 19 (homophonic words such as see/sea) rated as 62%, obstacle 21 (ambiguous speech) reaching 60%, obstacle 9 (sound system problems) with 60%, obstacle 31 (a large number of students in the class) with 59%, obstacle 3 (the SI speaker's speech rate is high) rated as 57%, and finally obstacle 4 (the SI speaker's accent is incomprehensible), which was rated as 57%. After that, each student has written his/her own ideas about suggestions to improve SI learning at the departments of translation. A summary of their responses is given below.

1. Dividing students into smaller groups in the class because when there are many students in the class, the teacher is obliged to go with CI instead of SI, which is a problem for students after graduation because they do not know how to deal with SI properly.
2. Training students as much as possible and having many exercises, let students deliver presentations and activities in the classroom plan.
3. Teaching many tactics and methods, in addition to giving ideas about SI process.
4. Teaching step by step and gradually and not trying to teach difficult subjects and ask students to process them at once during one academic year.
5. Teaching SI from the 2nd year in order to be able to tackle it easily at the end of college.
6. Having a good pedagogical program.
7. A variety of topics should be interpreted simultaneously, without sticking to only one topic.
8. Having good equipment for practice.
9. The teacher should care of students in terms of teaching them properly.
10. The students' skills of TL should be taken into account.
11. There is a lack of well-trained teachers in SI.
12. Students should improve their skills to learn SI process easily and to study hard.
13. Kurdish language is very poor in terms of vocabulary, expressions, idioms, and phrases.
14. The place for learning SI is not suitable, which means there should be a room designed with booths and other SI equipment, and the floor where the SI laboratory is located should be quiet.
15. Having new teaching methods.
16. There should be an interested practical part with many different subjects.
17. Learning more about target language culture in terms of idioms and expression.
18. Having labs that will be very beneficial and an encouragement for students.
19. A language test should be mandatory with all those who get accepted at the translation department prior to enrolling them.
20. Having a theoretical method of SI to learn the process in books not only practice.
21. Most importantly, try to improve students' listening and speaking skills in SI.
22. Having additional hours for SI learning.
23. Instructors must help students in case they are struggling.
24. Equipment that will be used for SI should be modern equipment and new ones rather than old fashioned equipment.

Overall, these results indicate that students are aware of SI situations and based on their obstacles, these suggestions have been addressed. These suggestions are possible and need to be taken into consideration so as to overcome the problems of SI. Such solutions need to be taken into account because indeed a number of obstacles are faced such as lack of labs, professional teachers, lack of English knowledge, large number of students in one class, no care from instructors etc., so having such issues will make students careless and not work on their skills.

6. Conclusions

This study has reached a number of conclusions. The findings below are put forward in regards to SI problems and solutions:

1. There are many problems and obstacles such as difference of cultures, difference of structures between both languages, homophonic words, the ambiguity of dialects, sound system problems, speaker problems, shortage of time in the process of SI, lack of experience, lack of professional training, students' competence in the English language, having a huge number of students in the class, no labs and equipment, and problems in interpreting curriculum.
2. There are some significant solutions for difficulties such as improving students' listening skills, knowing the topic beforehand, being well-experienced, conducting a placement test before student's admission, working on memory skills, doing practice, being familiar with other dialects and target culture, the course of teaching SI should be well-organized, having background knowledge about idioms and expressions of both languages.
3. Some strategies for SI process such as do not be influenced by ST, do paraphrasing, use as simple expression as possible, use numbers approximation during encountering difficulties, use correction and omission tactics, do summarizing, use visual aid, use pace/speed control, use more natural statement expressions, use the support of background knowledge, do anticipation (guessing), filter messages, keep up with the speaker, try to have good timing, have good segmentation of meaning/sentences groups.

7. Recommendations

Due to the obstacles and problems that are faced in the SI module, students at Departments of Translation will definitely face difficulties in learning SI and instructors will face difficulties in teaching SI. Based on those difficulties and problems, the following recommendations are put forward:

1. There should be a placement exam or test before students' enrollment at the college, otherwise those students will be enrolled who have gotten no information about the English language and have got poor skills in English. This will affect them in regards to interpreting and other subjects as well.
2. Departments of Translation should have interpreting labs. These should be fully equipped with booths and SI system such as headphones, microphones, headsets, amplifiers, and control panel.
3. Onsite interpreting practice should be required so that the trainee students can attend to pass the course successfully.
4. Instructors should make all students practice in the class and they need to be divided into smaller groups so as to be able to let all students participate.
5. Students should work on themselves in terms of having good listening skills, having more vocabularies, improve their speaking, and learn techniques of SI.
6. The instructor should teach theoretical aspects of the topic to students for a month to cover all techniques and tactics of SI properly and then start the practice aspect.
7. The field of SI is very wide and students need to be trained carefully.
8. Students need to be well informed in the process of SI and culture of both the SL and TL.
9. SI students should be well aware of the problems involved in SI in general, such as sound system problems, lack of time, ambiguous speeches etc., and lexical and syntactic problems in particular.
10. The Ministry of Higher Education should put a suitable curriculum for instructors to be able to follow up and help them with providing the needed equipment.

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Appendices

Appendix A

A Questionnaire for Students

Dear student, Please kindly rate the following obstacles and problems that you are currently facing in Simultaneous Interpreting Module.

No.	Obstacles	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	Non-professional speakers.					
2.	Inaccurate pronunciation by the speaker.					
3.	The SL speaker's speech rate is high.					
4.	The SL speaker's accent is incomprehensible.					
5.	Inability to catch up with the speaker during delivering the interpretation.					
6.	Sound difficulties while interpreting.					
7.	When there is a native or a fluent speaker, it will affect the interpreting outcomes because the interpreter may not be a native one or may not get what the speaker has said.					
8.	Word order differences between SL and TL, the order of the words in SL differs from that in the TL.					
9.	Sound system problems.					
10.	Instructors do not give the opportunity to the student to evaluate the course.					
11.	The course is above students' level.					
12.	Weekly hours are not enough to learn.					
13.	The teaching method is theoretical which is not helpful for students.					
14.	Variety of religious concept.					
15.	SL idioms might be problematic.					
16.	Lack of international terms such as Shipping and trade terms.					
17.	New idioms and expressions while delivering the interpreting.					
18.	Missing words during interpreting.					
19.	Homophonic words such as see/sea.					
20.	Long speeches.					
21.	Ambiguous speech.					

22.	Long boring sentences.					
23.	Time and place are problematic.					
24.	Lack of experience.					
25.	Lack of knowledge about the topic					
26.	Lack of SI equipment.					
27.	Lack of SI syllabus.					
28.	The questions raised up by the audience during interpreting.					
29.	Embarrassing situations such as dialect, pre-knowledge and intended meaning.					
30.	Inability to engage in team working.					
31.	A large number of students in the class.					
32.	Cultural differences.					
33.	Lack of communicative competence in English.					
34.	The learning environment is not really helpful to learn.					
35.	Lack of professional training.					

Q/ What do you suggest for improving SI learning at the Department of Translation?

Appendix B

Interview with Instructors

1. What are your teaching methods and why do you use these methods?
2. Is there any well-organized plan by the Ministry of Higher Education for lecturers to use it during teaching SI?
3. What are the main problems that you are currently facing when teaching SI?
4. How is the student level in SI? If the level is good, why? And if it is not good, why?
5. What are your own strategies so as to let students learn better and meet challenges?
6. What are your recommendations to make SI a manageable subject for students?