Pedagogy of interpreting reviewed: Some prominent issues

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Abstract

Interpreting process starts with the perception of message. Interpreters should be skillful enough in getting the message which demands their familiarity with the cultural nuances, setting of interpretations and the type of participants in decoding the message. Interpreters should compute meaning with the exposure to the target language and activation of relevant knowledge in their mind to find appropriate equivalences according to the genre of participants. Then, they would encode meaning of the perceived message with the appropriate structure and style according to the type of audience and settings. In some cases omission of some aspects in interpretation enhances the quality of interpreting and as a result communication of message is done properly. Culture has a main role in interpreting contexts and just knowing the languages comprehensively does not suffice in the mediation of meaning in different cultural contexts. So, future interpreters should make themselves aware of the cultural nuances in interpretation. Research in the area of interpreting studies has not been enough and this field has not flourished the way it should. The curriculum of interpreting studies needs to be modified in order to meet the needs of students in this field so that it can make them qualified interpreters in their future job. One of these changes can be in the period of training for interpreters. A comprehensive curriculum should be designed. Implementation of the new curriculum should be done with more attention to training settings. Evaluation of students' performance in different universities should be done with careful attention to the educational plan by looking at all aspects of learning.

Key words: *Interpreting process, curriculum, evaluation, culture, omission*

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Introduction

Interpreting studies demand more attention and compared with translation studies, this field has been paid less attention. Interpreting can be a foundation to learn translation for the students as well. Research in the area of interpreting studies has not been enough and this field has not flourished the way it should. Ma (2003) pointed out that interpreting as a recently grown up profession has been recognized in international communities. Interpreters assist people to overcome to their language barriers and mediate people from different communities in their communication. Therefore, on order to accomplish their tasks, they have to have special talents and learned skills, thus, the skills which are necessary for qualified interpreters have received a lot of attention. So, according to analysis of interpreting itself, all the authorities in this field agree that the final goal of teaching interpretation would be to train required skills for interpreters.

By looking at the social context and the setting of interpreting, Pöchhacker (2004) mentions that if interpreting is looked at from historical perspective, the most labeling factor for it would be the social context where the interpreting was performed. In past, interpreting was conducted when different linguistic and cultural communities contacted with each other for particular reason. Moreover, it was used intra-socially when mediation of communication was necessary in hetrolingual societies. Considering the ultimate goal of interpretation and its different dimensions, Musyoka&Karanja (2014: 196) claim that the final goal of interpretation would be to have the same influence in the audience of target language as it was supposed to have for the audience in the source language. Interpretation is a multi-faceted phenomenon which has a sender, a channel and a recipient like other types of communication.

Moreover, they argue that the most important principle in interpreting would be the language proficiency since they believe that interpreting is beyond the rendering of words from source language into target language. It needs getting the meaning of the speech and perceiving the sense of message before

transferring it to the target audience. So, it demands that interpreter should be completely familiar with subject of the message and by considering the context, take advantage of not only the verbal information but also any other types of information in communicating meaning for the audience.

Garzone (2000), looking at the growing field of interpreting and problems associated with it, points out that studies in the field of interpreting focused on different dimensions of interpreting including information processing, memorization, note-taking, lateralization, psychomotory and neural activity in interpreting and cultural aspects of it. Binhua and Lei (2009) pay attention to the pedagogy of interpreting and its research challenges and believe that the growing field of interpreting programs made different scholars more interested comparing past in research in methodological issues in this area and in trying to develop a comprehensive curriculum and syllabi for training interpreters. This current wave has made in some countries the curriculum of interpreting studies undergo modification so that it can meet the needs of interpreting programs. Moreover, Binhua and Lei (2009) hold that the interpreting these days would be a prestigious job in the society by asserting that good socio-economic condition including with advantageous academic settings have paved the way to enhance the position of interpreter training programs.

But some scholars believe that just modification in curriculum is not enough and other types of training are also necessary. Kornakov (2000), discussing other dimensions of interpreter training such as psycho-linguistic training, points out that in training future interpreters the psycholinguistic aspects should be taken into account since self-training and self-preparation would be the most important part of the work that instructor can help the trainees through guidelines and exercises which can be advantageous in doing their job in future. Kalina (2000) examined training problems some instructors have faced, and mentioned that instructors in the field of interpreting who are using the methods and strategies in order to accomplish their goal by receiving the outcome of research from others feel uneasy in waiting to get the idea from

research outcomes. Moreover, Kalina (2000) asserted the need of empirical studies to solve the problems associated with interpreter training by pointing out the necessity of having more empirical studies on the effectiveness of different methodologies in training interpreters.

In summary, the different points of view reviewed above converge on the idea that the curriculum of interpreting studies needs to be modified in order to meet the needs of students in this field so that it can make them qualified interpreters in their future jobs. One of these changes can be in the period of training for interpreters. The training period at present in Iran is in most of the cases too long since most of the students do not show any interest to enter into training settings since they think that it would take a long time for them to graduate and find a job in their field. Therefore, they prefer to embark on other, related fields. Another aspect requiring change would be the quality of training which needs to be reconsidered and modified. In some domains of interpreting at this time there is no training of prosodic features and differences therein between the source and target language involved in the interpreting task. A third aspect can be the syllabus of instructors in different classes which needs to be studied to see which points and domains function better compared to other ones.

Therefore, according to the nature of learning, sound and logical decisions should be taken in order to get good results. The following points should receive more attention in interpreting studies. Firstly, a comprehensive curriculum should be designed while cooperating with scholars in this field. As Sawyer (2004) pointed out, the most important problem in doing studies in the area of curriculum of interpreting would be unreliable sources (pym 1998) about the documents. Collecting these documents from different academic settings and schools of interpreting studies would be so difficult because in most of the cases there would not be an exact place in collecting them. Secondly, implementation of the new curriculum should be done with more attention considering training settings.

In this regard, Sawyer (2004) asserted that the complexity of curriculum design and perceiving this issue by practitioners should be taken into account. Lateral, required expertise in different dimensions should be available when implementing those aspects and there should be reliable assessment to see whether the curriculum would be effective or not. Thirdly, evaluation of students' performance in different universities according an educational plan should be done with careful attention to all aspects of learning.Beauchamp (1975) claimed that theory can be some statements which are to give functional meaning to some events and on the other hand curriculum theory would be some general statements which provides meaning for school curriculum by clarifying the relationship among element and its practice and its evaluation. As for evaluation of students' performance a new policy should be applied. As new software and technologies have become available, the evaluation can be done more precisely than before. However, the evaluation should not include just the performance of students but the entire curriculum and its implementation should also be taken into account.

The interpreting process

Some scholars look at the immediacy and mental aspect of interpreting and they believe that the processes which are done in the mind of interpreters cannot be observed. They give the example of moving the leaves when the wind blows. People can see the movement of leaves and based on that they understand the wind blows. It would be the same in interpreting which people can see the mediation of meaning between two parties but not what goes in the mind of interpreters and their actual mental processes(Gile, 1988, 1999, Moser-Mercer 1997, 2000, Pockhacker 2004, Roy 1999). In the interpreting process there are different variables which are all interrelated. The first important element would be concentrating on the source message in order to perceive and analyze message (Colonomos 1992).

In this stage the competence of the interpreter and his technical knowledge of the subject matter could be of utmost importance. Of course, the culture and environment in which the interpreting takes place can have a determining role in the transfer of the message. Ma (2003) emphasized the role of the interpreting process by mentioning different aspects which are necessary in interpreting. She pointed out that the interpreting process starts with a perception procedure which then goes on to a decoding procedure. She believes that in the perception stage through auditory and visual perception, interpreter perceives the message. She states that in this stage listening ability and the setting could have impact over the quality of interpretation.

Then in the decoding stage the interpreter extracts the information in linguistic and non-linguistic codes by processing the stored information in the perceptual auditory storage. In this stage the message is produced. In this stage, the factors which have an impact over the quality of message would be the source, the speaker, the background knowledge and the linguistic competence of the interpreter. She asserted further that listening in interpreting is more complicated process than general listening since the settings and the physical context where the communication is done would have impact in interpretation. Time management and constraint could make the interpreter to render the message at a furious pace and noise in the context of interpreting makes the perception of the message difficult for the interpreter (Ma 2003). Then she goes ahead and talks about the recording procedure, which may involve note-taking. Note-taking plays a crucial role in interpreting since it prevents the interpreter from overloading his memory.

The fourth stage is the encoding stage which would be activation of relevant knowledge in the mind to transfer the message to the audience. Here the choice of words and appropriate structures would be of utmost importance. The fifth and last stage of interpreting process would be the expressing stage. At this stage the interpreter expresses his/her message with the chosen structure to

the audience. Self-esteem and self-confidence of the interpreter play a very important role in this stage.

Therefore, the interpreting process starts with perception of the message. Interpreters should be skillful enough in getting the message which demands their familiarity with the cultural nuances, setting of interpretations and the type of participants in decoding the message. The first and second steps are of utmost importance for interpreter trainees so that they should develop strategies to perceive the message comprehensively. Then the interpreters should compute meaning with the exposure to the target language and activation of relevant knowledge in their mind to find appropriate equivalences according to the genre of participants. And, in the final stage, they would encode meaning of the perceived message with the appropriate structure and style according to the type audience and settings.

Omission in interpreting

Generally the norm is that interpreters should have a complete transfer of the source text to the audience, which does not leave any room for omission. This issue has received a lot of attention in typology of errors and error analysis. But we know that in some cases omission of some aspects in interpretation enhances the quality of interpreting and as a result communication of message is done properly. Pym (2008) explicitly pointed out that omission, quality of message and the context in which the communication is done have relationships.

He stated that the high quality in transferring of the message by the interpreters would not be the same as transferring all the points in the source text. He pointed out that the quality in interpreting would to what extent the communication act is achieved it goals. Supporting this perspective, Jones (2014) pointed out that interpreters in some situations are not in a position to render exact and complete messages. So, in such situations interpreters may omit part of the source text in order to have a coherent message for the

audience. Therefore, in some cases, interpreters intentionally omit part of the source language because they want to transfer the gist of the message and the audience can perceive the message easily. So, when it happens, the communication of message between the audience and interpreters can be achieved comprehensively.

We should know that in interpreting the important aspects and essentials are preferred over the completeness of message. However, the omission issue in interpreting, which is the incomplete form of transfer of message from source language to target language, has been a controversial issue. Sometimes omission is considered as a mistake but in other cases it is looked at as a technique which interpreters resort to in complicated situations, in cases in which they suffer from cognitive overload. Pym (2008: 95) differentiates between low risk omission and high risk omission and he claims that low risk omission would be a technique by the interpreters to manage the time they have to transfer the message; anything which is not perceivable, irrelevant and extra should not be interpreted.

Thus, in these cases omission can be a technique which makes interpretation coherent. Gile (1995: 173) stated that generally there would be some points that jeopardize interpretation. He summarized them as follows: 1. High rate of delivery of language, 2. High density of information content, 3. Strong accents, 4. Incorrect grammar. Research shows that there is a positive relationship between delivery rate and omission by interpreters to the effect that faster delivery makes interpreters omit more redundancies of language in order to keep their mental energy.

In some cases the interpreters indeed resort to omitting some part of the message in the terminal stage of the interpreting process because of cognitive overload of their memory or tiredness. Whatever the reason would be, what is of utmost importance, is that the gist of the message should be transferred to the audience and at the same time the interpreters should be loyal to the basic structure of the message and it should not be altered in any way so that there

would be misunderstanding in the communication of the message. Considering all these aspects, it should be pointed here that omission issue in interpreting did not enjoy enough research in the past because of the different cultural contexts and this issue demands much more investigation.

Input and output in interpreting

Yenkimaleki& Van Heuven (2013) in a study looking at the procedure of the interpreting itself and the role of memory in interpreting hold that interpreting is a communication procedure between two parties who do not know each other's language and want to mediate meaning through language. This mediation of meaning is done by third person who knows both languages. The first party produces a stretch of speech which interpreter renders it to second party language and vice versa.

Interpreting can be done in parallel with the input speech in source or target language (simultaneous interpreting) or it can be done by taking turns by two parties (consecutive interpreting). To be professional interpreter demands intensive training for years. Interpreting studies has been established to provide a model for the interpreting mechanism, which it can be used to enhance training qualified future interpreters. In interpreting, the interpreter should keep the semantic representation of input speech in memory, so that to provide acceptable output in the target language. The other aspect in interpreting and input processing would be the familiarity of interpreters with different dialects and pronunciations so that the interpreters may get the message easily and comprehensively.

In this respect, Ma (2003) should be proficient enough to perceive the message on the spot since interpreting is oral work which everything about it goes away as soon as the mediation is done. Since different parties in interpreting come from different situations, the procedure of wording their intentions and their pronunciation would differ from each other. So, this demands knowing the source and target language rules of pronunciation. There

would be some cases that interpreters have to interpret for no-native speakers whose pronunciation would be difficult to follow because of mother tongue influence. It would an advantage for interpreters to be familiar with different accents and types of pronunciation so that it can help interpreters in finding clues in perceiving the message and mediation of meaning successfully. There are a lot of non-native English speakers in different organizations who have different accents and pronunciation types and moreover, there are people who speak Nigerian English, Spanish English in the international gatherings. Therefore, familiarity with all types of accents and pronunciation for interpreters seems to be a necessity in accomplishing their job.

The other important point would be the type of input for interpreter trainees in order to train them skillfully to perform their jobs. In this respect Jezo (2011) believes that the ideas of Krashen could be applied. He stated that Krashan (1982, 1985, 1998) emphasized the most important role of input for second language learners. Krashan (1985) input hypothesis states that input should be available and provided for the second language learners ant input should be a little beyond the learner's current second language competence. He uses (i+1) formula for his idea and says that the provided input should be of interest and relevant to the learner and learner should consciously pay attention to it. Jones pays attention to the aspect of understanding of available input by specifying his ideas.

He claimed that the most important aspect for interpreters is to perceive intentions and ideas and do not limit themselves to words. It is practically possible to render the speaker ideas and meaning without perceiving every single word he utters or reproducing all the expressions of the source language speech.

Obviously, then, input and understandability of it by the interpreter trainees are extremely important aspects of interpreter training which should be emphasized in the interpreting curriculum. When training interpreters, the ultimate goal in the first stage is to train learners in developing listening

comprehension skills so that they have the potentiality of perceiving the message. Instructors need to expose learners to a range of authentic listening experiences and by doing so they could become familiar with different dialects and pronunciation types. This can be done by using a lot of different authentic listening materials, such as stories, conversations, descriptive talks, etc., which incorporate a variety of languages, whether formal or informal, spoken by native speakers or foreign speakers and training awareness in prosodic features of the second language so that interpreter trainees can perceive the points easily.

All these activities and tasks could make learners familiarized with real and natural listening material, thus, to some extent, problems like message perception, pronunciation, speed, culture, etc., should be no problem anymore. Therefore, it can concluded that different points of view which were elaborated here can be of great help for future interpreter trainees and instructors in the field of interpreting to perceive the message and improve the quality of their work. Moreover, instructors should bear in mind that being familiar with recent theories of message perception and production make them raise their consciousness to train their students more efficiently.

The issue of culture in interpretation/translation

Mohammadi&Yenkimaleki (2010), in an experimental study, claimed that to study the relationship between culture and interpretation, one has to study the interaction between culture and language since interpreting is a manifestation of applying language practically in human relations. Most scholars accept that the variables of culture, interpretation and language are interwoven and they do have a direct influence over each other. Moreover, the culture of the societies should be taken into account in interpreting in the setting which communication of message is done. In this respect, scholars in linguistics and applied linguistics agree that without paying attention and understanding the culture of the society people cannot learn or teach that language and those who have learned the foreign language and are not familiar with the cultural norms of that society,

they are not successful in communication of meaning with native speakers and show unacceptable language behavior which are not acceptable for the native speakers of that language (Hinkle 1997 cited in Mohammadi&Yenkimaleki 2010). The effect of translation and interpretation in different societies goes beyond the transferring of ideas and scientific texts for different communities. Regarding this issue, Mohammadi&Yenkimaleki (2010) pointed out that interpreting has a cultural aspect in it since human interaction is involved in the mediation of ideas. Interpretation can be beneficial for the nations in recognizing, strengthening and purifying their national identity through understanding other identities in different cultures. Through interpretation, lots of issues can be clarified, information can be transferred to different parties and innovative perspectives can be brought which are the stepping stones for setting up different institutes, social activities and cultural activities.

Li &Guo (2013) go beyond the micro-level of interpretation/translation and look at the macro-levels in it and claimed that one of the problems that translated works in third world countries do not receive enough attention in some other countries would be the element of culture. They explicitly pointed out that the third world countries would face the following problems in promoting their nations' literature: (i) their language is not one of the main languages of the world and it would be an obstacle in accepting it, (ii) the weak political and economic position makes the culture of that country not to receive enough attention by other nations, and (iii) their work are generally involved with unique cultural and national particularities which makes it difficult for the other nations to understand it. Also, Torop (2002) gives significance to the position of culture in interpretation/translation by claiming that the activity of translation and translation as the product of this activity are inseparable from cultural perspectives. Moreover, Oatey and Xing (2009), supporting the role of culture in the mediation of message, pointed out that interpreters involvement in their profession can be highly influenced by cultural aspects in mediation of meaning.

Culture, then, does have a major role in interpreting contexts and just knowing the languages comprehensively does not suffice in the mediation of meaning in different cultural contexts. So, future interpreters should make themselves aware of the cultural nuances in interpretation. However, research in this area was not enough and it needs more investigation in different societies according to the norms of those countries/ local areas in order to clarify more important dimensions of cultural misunderstanding for future interpreters.

Assessment of interpreting

Assessment plays a very important role in interpreter training, not only for the trainees but also for the instructors themselves in order to understand the quality of their training and to perceive the problems in their methodology. Most of the practitioners in the field of interpreting are somehow aware of the basic aspects of evaluation. But the instructors in the field of interpreting studies should be up to date in the new theories and studies which have been done on the assessment aspect in interpreting education. In this regard, Wu (2010) pointed out that systematic assessment of interpreting issues demands taking advantage of other well-established disciplines such as language testing and educational assessment and using their theories and application of those perspectives in interpreting (Sawyer 2004, Hatim & Mason 1997; cited in Wu 2010).

Other scholars also emphasized the role of testing in the interpreter studies. Sawyer (2004) in this respect says right assessment will yield high quality education. In educational settings assessment gives the sound evidence to the trainees that higher objectives of the curriculum have been met. Therefore, assessment and testing have a very vital role in different educational programs since assessment tells the authorities that how much the goals of instruction have been achieved and it be used for evaluation of the success of the program. Practically it cannot be possible to measure the success of the educational goals of institutional settings without valid and reliable assessment. The other issue is

the matter of complexity of assessment procedure in the field of interpreting since in most of the cases there is no record of whatever which has been done. Supporting this view, Wu (2010) says that in translation test there would be paper which can be used for assessment aspect but in interpreting the work is oral. In different forms of conferences and meetings there would be no record in most of the cases of interpreters' work. This issue makes assessment procedure of interpreting work difficult and also measuring the quality of the interpreter's job cannot be carried out as it deserves. Moreover, research in the field of interpreting as the field itself is in its beginning stages was not enough and also we do not have comprehensive studies regarding the assessment of the quality of interpreting. Wu (2010) holds that studies in the field of interpreting are in its initial stages by referring this field as a "new kid on the block". Wu states that some fundamental concepts and necessary testing instruments e.g. test construct and assessment criteria are not developed yet.

In any assessment procedure two aspects are of fundamental importance, i.e. the reliability of the test and the validity of it. Reliability of a test deals with evaluation of test design, procedure and results of a test. A test should show consistency in its operation so that it can be used as trustworthy device for measurement purposes. Whatever procedure which used should be the same for the subjects (Bailey 1998, Hamp-Lyons 1991; cited in Wu: 2010). The other important aspect would be the validity of the test. Validity of the test refers to meaningfulness of the scores and the extent to which a test assesses the property or quality which it was designed to measure. In this respect scholars hold that validity of the test to meaningfulness of the scores and deals with the concerns for the use of it in different settings (Luoma, 2004).

Therefore, if the test is not valid for use in different settings, it would not yield meaningful results and it would be distracting in its use. It shows how much the validity of the test can be vital for all the testers in different social settings (Alderson et al. 1995: 170; cited in Wu 2010).

It should be pointed out that according to the purpose of the test, the degree of importance of validity and reliability of the test would be different. Gipps (1994) believes that for certification and accountability purposes the reliability of the test should be of central concern in assessment procedure for comparability. However, when assessment is to be used for formative purposes then the validity of the test would be very crucial comparing the reliability of the test.

Therefore, testing would be involved in different dimensions of interpreting studies, from the curriculum itself to the assessment of the quality of interpreters' performance and methodology of instructors in the field of interpreting. The performance of the interpreter trainees should be evaluated through formative and summative procedures in different stages of their training according to standard tests in order to assure the quality of their training. The curriculum of interpreter training should be evaluated in order to enhance the syllabus and materials which are included in it. The instructors and the practitioners in the field of interpreter training should evaluate the quality of their training by the feedback they are receiving from their learners so that they may improve the quality of their work.

Conclusion

Therefore, it can be pointed out that the curriculum of interpreting needs modification depending on the different types of languages involved. So, it demands that instructors, who are the models in most of the cases for the interpreter trainees, be conscious and proficient enough in the perception of the problems according to the languages they are working and provide the necessary instructive feedbacks. Cultural aspects in different settings and familiarity of the interpreters of the cultural nuances should be considered in interpreter training by providing enough authentic texts. This can be done through authentic movies, media and textbooks which are culturally seeded.

Omission does have a negative view by most of the instructors and they should be aware that in some cases the omitting of part the message make the mediation of meaning comprehensively possible since the interpreters would be under time pressure, cognitively overloaded and tired by concentrating so the omission makes them release from this pressure. Therefore, it can be concluded that issues which were elaborated here demand more investigations in different societies according to specific cultural contexts of those areas. The aforementioned points can be of great help for instructors, practitioners, material produces, researchers in the field of interpreting and for future interpreters to improve the quality of their work. Moreover, instructors should bear in mind that they should have conversation with researchers in this area so that to put into practice the results of the studies of the researchers and they should not look at themselves just as practitioners.

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