Problem Analysis and Learning of Interpreting: A Study in Student Perception, Teacher Evaluation and a Corpus-Based Analysis of Student Performance
問題分析與口譯學習：學生自我認識、教師評估及學生口譯表現的語料庫分析法

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by

Pan Jun
潘珺

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Problem analysis has played an important role in studies concerning students and professional interpreters. While problems in interpreting have been investigated by different schemes and approaches, little consensus has been reached on the paradigm of analysis. Although interpreters’ and trainees’ self-perceptions of their interpreting performance have been reported in previous studies, they are seldom compared with an evaluation of their actual performance. In interpreter training, learners’ self-perceptions of their problems usually serve as the monitor of their learning process, which makes it crucial to study learners’ perceptions and their relationship to factors associated with the learning of interpreting. This study thus aims to fill the research gap and make a significant contribution in this area.

The present study set out to investigate the learning of interpreting from a problem analysis perspective. A three-level analytical model of interpreting problems was applied in the study, including problems at the levels of language/form, content/meaning and presentation/delivery. Participants of the study included 317 undergraduate students enrolled in interpreting courses (English and Chinese) in a university in southeast China. In addition, 4 interpreting teachers participated in the research. A combination of questionnaires, interviews and elicitation interpreting tests was employed. Focus group interviews were conducted with 45 students who were selected based on parameters of interest in this study. Students’ interpreting scores and language scores were collected as achievement measures. A group of 77 students participated in the elicitation interpreting test, the output of which consisted of a small-size interpreting learner corpus.

Findings of the study suggest that students applied meaning-oriented criteria in their self-evaluation in interpreting. However, they more often seemed to encounter delivery level problems in their interpreting practice. Deficiency in relevant vocabulary was also a concern of student interpreters. Many learner variables were found to be significantly related to students’ perceptions of interpreting problems, including dialect, family background, language competence (Chinese and English), language learning habits (English), self-training duration, knowledge of, interest and confidence in interpreting, as well as their multitasking skills and short-term memory. Students’ score
in English Listening, their self-perceived Chinese writing ability and score in English Intensive Reading were found to be the top three significant contributors to their interpreting achievement. Moreover, the comparison between student-perceived and teacher-evaluated problems in interpreting indicated that students tended to significantly under-evaluate the problems of "inaccurate pronunciation" and "repetition and self-correction". A corpus-based analysis of students' interpreting output in the elicitation test suggested that there were substantial occurrences of both types of problems. The students' greatest pronunciation problem was segmental error, especially the use of incorrect consonants. For the second problem, most self-repairs and truncated segments were finished by students. The former occurred primarily at the lexical level and the latter at the phonological level, both often resulting in the articulation of relevant segments.

This study provided a three-dimensional way to examine problems in students' learning of interpreting at the undergraduate level. Learners' self-perceptions, teacher's evaluation of their actual problems and a corpus-based analysis of their under-evaluated problems were all included in the picture. Influences from learner variables were taken into consideration. The impact of these variables and problem perceptions on learners' achievement in interpreting was also examined. The study indicated the importance of addressing relevant learner variables in interpreting classrooms, such as learners' socio-biographic and cognitive-affective factors, language competence and learning habits. It also called for a supportive classroom environment to help learners examine their interpreting performance in a more objective way. The subsequent corpus-based analysis of students' under-evaluated problems provided specific insights to the training of interpreting students.
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