

CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING EQUIVALENCE IN SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF LEXICAL AND SYNTACTIC STRUCTURES

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Annotation. This article delves into the complexities of achieving equivalence in simultaneous interpretation, with a focus on lexical and syntactic structures. It explores the inherent challenges interpreters face when dealing with the differences in word order, idiomatic expressions, and grammatical structures across languages. The analysis compares how lexical and syntactic disparities affect interpretation accuracy and fluency, emphasizing real-time decision-making. The study also highlights strategies used by professional interpreters to mitigate these issues, such as paraphrasing, anticipating speaker intent, and prioritizing key message components. The findings provide insights into how interpreters maintain fidelity to the source text while adapting to the target language's structural constraints. This research offers valuable guidelines for both aspiring and practising interpreters, promoting a deeper understanding of equivalence in the simultaneous interpretation process.

Keywords: simultaneous interpretation, equivalence, lexical structures, syntactic structures, interpreting strategies, language comparison, translation challenges, real-time interpretation, professional interpreting.

Introduction. Simultaneous interpretation is a complex cognitive and linguistic process that requires interpreters to convert spoken messages from a source language into a target language in real-time. Achieving equivalence between languages in this high-pressure context is a major challenge, as interpreters must handle differences in lexical and syntactic structures while maintaining accuracy, fluency, and speaker intent. Unlike written translation, simultaneous interpretation leaves little room for reflection or revision, demanding rapid decision-making and multitasking skills. These factors make equivalence the extent to which the meaning, tone, and nuance of the source language are preserved especially difficult to achieve¹. The concept of equivalence in translation has long been debated in translation studies, with different types of equivalence (such as formal, dynamic, and functional) being discussed across

¹ Gile D. (2009). Basic Concepts and Models for Interpreter and Translator Training. John Benjamins.

various contexts. In simultaneous interpretation, however, the challenge is further compounded by the interpreter's need to process information continuously, making real-time adaptations and compromises to ensure the listener receives an understandable and accurate version of the original message.

Lexical and syntactic equivalence, in particular, pose significant challenges due to the vast differences between languages in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure. While interpreters strive for fidelity, these linguistic differences can sometimes force them to depart from a literal translation to convey the speaker's intended meaning effectively. This article focuses on the challenges and strategies interpreters use to achieve equivalence in lexical and syntactic structures during simultaneous interpretation. Lexical equivalence involves finding corresponding terms and expressions in the target language, which can be complicated by idiomatic expressions, culture-specific terms, or technical jargon. Syntactic equivalence, on the other hand, relates to sentence structure and word order, which often vary significantly between languages². For example, languages like English, which typically follow a subject-verb-object (SVO) structure, may differ from others that use a subject-object-verb (SOV) order. By comparing the handling of these issues across different language pairs, this article aims to provide a detailed understanding of how interpreters navigate the complexities of lexical and syntactic structures. It will also highlight key strategies, such as paraphrasing, anticipation, and prioritization, that allow interpreters to manage these challenges while preserving equivalence.

1. Lexical equivalence in simultaneous interpretation

Lexical equivalence refers to the process of finding corresponding words or terms in the target language that accurately reflect the meaning and connotation of the source language. In simultaneous interpretation, achieving lexical equivalence can be one of the most daunting tasks, as different languages often possess unique cultural, social, and technical expressions that may not have direct counterparts in other languages. Interpreters frequently encounter issues related to idiomatic expressions, technical jargon, and culture-specific terms. Idiomatic expressions, which are common in everyday speech, are often language-specific and deeply rooted in cultural contexts³. For instance, a simple English idiom like “kick the bucket” (meaning to die) does not have a direct equivalent in many other languages. If rendered literally, it would likely confuse listeners or misrepresent the original meaning.

² Pöchhacker F. (2004). *Introducing Interpreting Studies*. Routledge.

³ Baker M. (1992). In *Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*. Routledge.

Thus, interpreters are required to use paraphrasing techniques to capture the essence of the expression while maintaining a natural flow in the target language. Technical jargon, especially in fields like law, medicine, or science, poses another significant challenge. For example, legal terms like “habeas corpus” or “ex parte” may not exist in other languages or may have different legal interpretations. To handle these situations, interpreters often rely on their prior knowledge of the subject matter or on interpreting strategies like circumlocution, where they explain the concept in simpler terms rather than translating the word directly. Cultural references, including names of local institutions, holidays, or historical figures, can also create difficulties. For example, references to “Thanksgiving” in an English speech may be meaningless to an audience unfamiliar with American traditions.

In such cases, interpreters must make a quick decision: either omit the reference, replace it with a culturally relevant equivalent in the target language, or briefly explain its meaning⁴. Interpreters use several strategies to tackle the issue of lexical equivalence. One of the most common is paraphrasing, where the interpreter rephrases the original message using different words to convey the same meaning. Paraphrasing helps interpreters overcome the limitations of direct translation by focusing on the message’s core idea rather than its literal form. Anticipation is another technique that interpreters use, particularly when they are familiar with the speaker’s topic or language patterns. By predicting upcoming words or phrases, interpreters can mentally prepare equivalent expressions in the target language, reducing the risk of delays or errors in translation.

Terminology preparation before interpretation sessions is crucial, especially in specialized fields like law or medicine. Interpreters often research and compile glossaries of terms specific to the subject matter, ensuring they are equipped with the necessary vocabulary to maintain accuracy during interpretation⁵. Additionally, interpreters may rely on context-based interpretation, where they consider the broader context of the speech to infer the correct meaning of ambiguous or unfamiliar words.

2. Syntactic equivalence in simultaneous interpretation

Syntactic equivalence refers to the structural alignment of sentences between the source and target languages. While lexical equivalence deals with words, syntactic equivalence focuses on how those words are arranged within a sentence. This can be especially challenging in simultaneous interpretation, as different languages follow different grammatical rules and sentence structures. The most apparent challenge of

⁴ Setton R. (1999). *Simultaneous Interpretation: A Cognitive-Pragmatic Analysis*. John Benjamins.

⁵ Viaggio S. (1992). *The Pragmatics of Interpreting*. Meta: Journal des traducteurs.

syntactic equivalence arises from the differences in word order between languages. English, for instance, follows a subject-verb-object (SVO) structure, while languages like Japanese or Korean follow a subject-object-verb (SOV) structure.

When interpreting from English into an SOV language, the interpreter must wait until the end of the sentence to determine the object before completing the sentence in the target language. This creates a significant delay and puts pressure on the interpreter's working memory, as they must hold large chunks of information before delivering the interpretation. Another issue is the syntactic complexity of certain languages. Languages like German often feature long compound sentences with multiple subordinate clauses, which can make it difficult for interpreters to maintain a coherent flow when translating into a language with simpler sentence structures. Conversely, interpreters working from a language with simpler structures into one with more complex grammar must be careful not to oversimplify or misrepresent the speaker's intent. Syntactic features like gender agreement and case marking also pose difficulties in achieving equivalence. For example, in languages with grammatical gender, such as French or Russian, interpreters must ensure that nouns, adjectives, and verbs agree in gender and number, even when these features do not exist in the source language.

Interpreters employ several strategies to deal with the challenges of syntactic equivalence. One approach is restructuring, where interpreters reorganize the sentence structure of the source language to fit the grammatical rules of the target language. In this process, they might break down long, complex sentences into shorter, more manageable units, or rearrange the sentence order to ensure clarity⁶. This technique is especially helpful when interpreting from a language with flexible word order into one with stricter syntactic rules. Another strategy is lagging or delaying the interpretation. In languages with different sentence structures, interpreters often wait for key information such as the verb or object before starting their interpretation. While this technique can help in maintaining syntactic coherence, it comes at the cost of increasing cognitive load, as the interpreter must keep track of information over a longer period.

Effective time management and mental compartmentalization are critical to success in this strategy. Interpreters also make use of chunking, where they divide the source language input into smaller, more digestible segments. This helps manage memory load and allows the interpreter to process information incrementally, reducing the risk

⁶ Shlesinger M. (2003). *Effects of Linguistic Structure on Simultaneous Interpretation*. Springer.

of errors or omissions⁷. Furthermore, chunking can improve the fluency and coherence of the interpreted message by ensuring that each segment is delivered clearly and completely.

3. Balancing lexical and syntactic equivalence

While lexical and syntactic equivalence pose distinct challenges, interpreters must often address both simultaneously. Balancing these two aspects of interpretation requires flexibility and adaptability, as interpreters must be prepared to prioritize one over the other depending on the context. For instance, in some cases, syntactic fidelity might need to be sacrificed to maintain lexical accuracy, particularly when translating specialized terms or technical jargon.

Conversely, there may be situations where maintaining syntactic structure is crucial for conveying the speaker's message, even if it means rewording or simplifying certain lexical elements. Interpreters often rely on prioritization strategies to strike this balance. In high-stakes situations where legal or technical accuracy is critical, they may prioritize lexical equivalence, ensuring that specific terms are translated accurately, even if the sentence structure is somewhat altered. In more general contexts, where clarity and fluency are paramount, they may focus on maintaining natural syntax in the target language, even if it requires the use of approximate or simplified vocabulary.

Conclusion. Achieving equivalence in simultaneous interpretation is a multifaceted challenge that requires interpreters to navigate the complex interplay between lexical and syntactic structures. While interpreters are trained to strive for fidelity to the original message, the real-time nature of simultaneous interpretation means that compromises are often necessary. Through strategies like paraphrasing, restructuring, lagging, and chunking, interpreters can manage these challenges effectively, ensuring that the target audience receives a coherent and accurate interpretation. The dynamic and adaptive nature of these strategies highlights the skill and expertise required in the profession and underscores the importance of ongoing training and preparation to handle the linguistic intricacies of simultaneous interpretation.

⁷ Lederer M. (1981). La traduction simultanée: expérience et théorie. Minard.

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