



## CENTRAL ASIAN JOURNAL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HISTORY

Journal homepage: <https://cajssh.centralasianstudies.org>



### The Problem of Short-Term Memory and its Improvement in Simultaneous Interpretation

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#### Annotation:

The primary aim of the given publication work is to show how important is the role of memory in the process of interpretation. Analysing short - term memory its consequences in interpretation, and of course exercises for improving short term memory exercises are initial tasks of our article.

#### ARTICLE INFO

##### Article history:

Received 18-Oct-22

Received in revised form 19-Nov-22

Accepted 18-Dec-22

Available online 19-Jan-2023

**Key word:** short-term memory, Listening and Analysis Effort, Production Effort, shadowing, attentive listening for key elements.

Due to the fact that demand for experienced interpreters is increasing day by day, as more and more international conferences, meetings are being held. That's why improvement in interpreters' experience, success, trainings is very initial one, and we should remind that good memory is the first assistant to interpreters.

Ever since the 19th century, memory has been classified as long-term or short-term. This difference was explored in more depth in 1968, by the Atkinson-Shiffrin memory model, that suggests that human memory involves a three phase sequence.

#### SHORT-TERM MEMORY:

Our short-term memory is where most information processing takes place. It is where we try to give meaning to what we see and what we hear, converting this information into something significant,

filling the blanks with elements from long-term memory. At this stage, information is held for 15 to 30 seconds, more than enough for it to be reused.\*

## SHORT-TERM MEMORY AND INTERPRETING

The role of short-term memory while interpreting has been discussed by several researchers. We have, for instance, Daniel Gile, who considers interpreting performance as a set of three efforts, each of which with their own role in the limited supply of processing capacity:

1. **Listening and Analysis Effort:** concerning all comprehension activities, such as the analysis of the acoustic characteristics of sounds, the recognition of certain sequences of sounds and the interpretation of the meaning of words and sentences.
2. **Production Effort:** the production part of interpreting, involving all operation, from the mental representation of the message to its delivery.
3. **Short-Term Memory Effort:** concerning all operations that occur continuously while interpreting. Short-term memory operations are necessary due to the delay between the moment the speech is made and the moment it is analysed. Furthermore, short-term memory also has a role between the moment the sounds of the speech are analysed and converted into ideas and the time the speech is produced. This effort may be intensified due to situational problems or specific linguistic factors (for instance, the speaker's accent may be hard to understand, the speech may not be clear or the information presented may be dense). It is also harder to retrieve information if the source language is syntactically different, with different structures than the target language, forcing the interpreter to reformulate segments of the speech earlier than normal.

## CONSEQUENCES OF A SHORT-TERM MEMORY

A short-term memory has negative consequences, some of which may not be obvious. However, the more obvious consequences of a poor short-term memory are related to:

- The omission of a qualifier (saying “powerful” instead of “extremely powerful”);
- The omission of a subordinate clause (saying “the thief was detained by the store’s security guard” instead of “the thief, that was caught red handed, was detained by the store’s security guard”);
- Omission of sentences.

To reduce these memory problems, interpreters might take notes during the consecutive or simultaneous interpretations. **Names, numbers and dates** should be written down, since they are very difficult, if not impossible, to retain, particularly when there are several of these elements grouped together. The same applies to complicated technical terms and for all information that is new to the interpreter, these should be written down in order to be analysed and understood.

However, the more notes the interpreter makes, more of his attention is focused upon making notes and less on the effort of listening and analysing, both of which essential to a good interpretation. So, it is important that interpreters improve their short term memory in all ways possible.

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\* Zhong, W., 2003. “Memory Training in Interpreting” in Translation Journal, available at: <http://translationjournal.net/journal/25interpret.htm> [accessed March 2011]

## EXERCISES TO IMPROVE SHORT-TERM MEMORY

### *Exercise 1: Shadowing*

The exercise of *shadowing* involves repeating what the speaker says, word for word, in the same language. Normally, the interpreter will be a word or two behind the speaker as one repeats what has been said. This delay may be increased as the interpreter becomes more comfortable. This exercise is often used in preparation for simultaneous interpreting, since it teaches the interpreter to listen and talk at the same time. It is also very good for memory development, since it forces the interpreter to store and recall small groups of sounds, words and chunks of information in a relatively short period of time. However, it is complicated by the fact that the speaker continues to speak while the interpreter is recalling a previous segment, forcing the interpreter to listen and speak at the same time.

For this exercise, the texts used should be relatively small, but may increase gradually in size. If you work alone, record a text or use a speech from the television or radio. If you work in a group, one may read the text while the other repeats it.

### *Exercise 2: Attentive listening for key elements*

Careful listening is an important element for memory recall. If have not listened to something carefully, it will be impossible to remember later. First, attentive listening requires identifying a speech's key points. For example, you should be capable of listening to a short narrative or a descriptive text and answer the key questions "Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?" While it might not always be possible to answer these questions in every case, the ability to answer most of them proves that you listened carefully to the key points.

In this exercise, any descriptive or narrative texts may be used and you may record the text, if you're practising alone, or you may ask a colleague to read it, if working in a group.

### *Exercise 3: Visualisation*

Most people are visual learners, this is, they remember things they see better than something they are told it or read on paper. Images remain in our minds much longer than abstract information. For this reason, mnemonics suggest one uses visualisation to retain different types of information by creating mental images. However, given that this kind of image is artificial, it takes a while to be created and, so, is not useful for an interpreter.

In any case, there are speeches that invoke visualisation naturally and the interpreter should be able to identify them and use visualisation to retain and recall. For example, court interpreters often have to interpret descriptions that were described by a witness (a place, a suspect, etc.). These descriptions are ideal for the use of visualisation to improve memory. Images should be visualised step by step and in sequential order, helping the interpreter recreate a whole scene.

Visualisation exercises may be completed with oral recall or, in some cases, by drawing the images in involved. In other words, recalling memories does not always have to be done through words. In this exercise, any descriptive or narrative texts may be used and you may record the text, if you're practising alone, or you may ask a colleague to read it, if working in a group.

To sum up we can conclude that all abovementioned info shows that memory is the key word for interpreters, since the successful interpretation relies on good memory. However there several ways

activities in order to improve any kind of memory for being ready for perfect interpretation.

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