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Effect of prosody awareness training on the quality of consecutive interpreting between English and Farsi

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Summary

The aim of the dissertation is to investigate the effect of prosody awareness training on the quality of consecutive interpreting between English and Farsi. It aims to provide a platform for developing theories on interpreter training. Also, the study aims to develop methods which increase both the intelligibility and naturalness of speech production of consecutive interpreters and raise the efficacy of recognition of non-native speech input in the interpreting process. So far, no experimental studies have been done on the effect of prosodic feature awareness training on the quality of interpreting.

Chapter one is the introduction. In this part, the research questions and the goals of dissertation are presented. The main question of this dissertation is: does awareness training of prosodic features (stress at word and sentence level) yield better performance by student interpreters? Normally, interpreting is done from a foreign language into the interpreter's native language, so called straight or *recto* interpreting. Sometimes, however, it may be necessary to interpret from one's native language into a foreign language. This is called inverse (or *verso*) interpreting. The second question this dissertation tries to answer is whether the beneficial effect of prosody awareness training might be different depending on the direction of the interpreting process.

Chapter two introduces interpreting studies and its pedagogy. Interpreting is defined as consisting of presenting in the target language the closest possible meaning of what is uttered in the source language, either simultaneously or consecutively, preserving the intention of speaker. Consecutive interpreting is the process by which the interpreter listens to a (sometimes fairly lengthy) section of speech delivered in the source language and then produces an oral rendition of the same message in the target language. Simultaneous interpreting is similar but the interpreter does not wait for the source language speaker to finish his turn but renders the speaker's message into the target language as he or she is speaking – so the speech produced by the source-language speaker and by the interpreter overlap in time. The materials produced for interpreter training should include prosody teaching and tasks which can make the learners raise their awareness of prosody. Omission is viewed negatively by most instructors. I argue that instructors should be aware that in some cases the omitting of part the message makes the mediation of meaning comprehensively possible, especially when interpreters are under time pressure, cognitively overloaded and/or tired from concentrating so the omission allows them to ease the pressure. Moreover, instructors should bear in mind that they should have cooperation with researchers in this area and they should not look at themselves just as practitioners.

Chapter three presents an experimental study of the effect of prosodic feature awareness training in interpreting. By prosody we mean all properties of speech that cannot be predicted from the identity of the mere string of vowels and consonants that make up a spoken sentence. Prosody refers to such phenomena as word stress (making one syllable stand out from all other syllables in a word) and sentence stress (making one

word more prominent than other words in a phrase or sentence), phrasing and intonation. Prosody helps listeners to divide the incoming speech into interpretable smaller units and highlight the key words in the sentence. The prosodic systems differ between languages which often results in incorrect speech production in a non-native language and misunderstanding of non-native input. Prosodic feature awareness training can therefore be useful to interpreters both in speech production and speech recognition. This chapter asks if awareness training of prosodic features (specifically, stress at the word and sentence levels) results in better performance by interpreter trainees. The participants of this study were 30 Iranian senior students of English translation and interpreting at the State University of Arak. The results of this study showed that interpreter trainees perform better if they have conscious knowledge of stress at the word and at sentence level and of the differences between the stress systems of their native target language (Farsi, i.e., New Persian) and of the foreign source language (English). Statistical analysis of our data showed that awareness of stress at the word and at sentence level contributes to the interpreter trainees' performance, especially on the variables of accentuation, pace (fluency of delivery) and (pleasantness of) voice.

Chapter four investigates the effect of the explicit teaching of prosodic features on developing word recognition skills by interpreter trainees. Two groups of student interpreters were composed. All were native speakers of Farsi who studied English translation and interpreting at the BA level at the State University of Arak, Iran. No significant differences in English language skills (TOEFL scores) could be established between the groups. Participants took a pre-test of word recognition skill before starting the program. The control group received routine exercises in listening comprehension, while the experimental group spent part of the time on theoretical explanation and practical exercises developing conscious knowledge of prosodic features of English, such as word and sentence stress. The total instruction time was the same for both groups, i.e., 8 hours. Students then took a post-test of word recognition skills. The results show that prosodic feature awareness training did yield a statistically significant improvement of word recognition skills.

Chapter five investigates the effect of explicit teaching of prosodic features on developing listening comprehension by interpreter trainees. Two groups of student interpreters were formed. All were native speakers of Farsi who studied English translation and interpreting at the BA level at the State University of Arak, Iran. Participants were assigned to groups at random (9 female and 9 male students in each group). No significant differences in English language skills (TOEFL scores) could be established between the groups. Participants took a standard pre-test of listening comprehension before starting the program. The control group practiced listening comprehension, while the experimental group spent part of the time on theoretical explanation of, and practical exercises with, prosodic features of English. The total instruction time was the same for both groups, i.e., 8 hours. Students then took a standard listening comprehension test. The results show that the prosodic feature awareness training significantly improved the students' listening comprehension skills.

Chapter six investigates the effect of explicit teaching of segmentals (properties of vowels and consonants) and suprasegmentals (prosody) on developing listening comprehension skills for Farsi-English interpreter trainees. Three groups of student inter-

preters were formed. All were native speakers of Farsi who studied English translation and interpreting at the BA level at the University of Applied Sciences in Tehran, Iran. Participants were assigned to groups at random (6 female and 6 male students in each group). No significant differences in English language skills (TOEFL scores) could be established between the groups prior to the experiment. Participants took a pre-test of listening comprehension before starting the program. The control group listened to authentic audio tracks in English and discussed their contents, watched authentic English movies, discussed issues in the movies in pairs in the classroom. The first experimental group spent part of the time on theoretical explanation of, and practical exercises with, English prosody. The second experimental group spent part of the time on theoretical explanation of, and practical exercises with, English vowels and consonants. The total instruction time was the same for all three groups, i.e., 12 hours. Students then took a post-test of listening comprehension skills. The results show that the explicit teaching of properties of vowels and consonants yielded better listening comprehension skills than teaching prosody awareness or using the routine curriculum.

Chapter seven attempts to relate the intersubjective expert judgments to objective measures that can be expected to correlate with the judgments. If such correlates can be found, the expert judgment can be predicted from some combination of objective correlates. If this prediction is sufficiently accurate, expert judgments could be dispensed with in the future and be replaced by objective measurements. Somewhat surprisingly, the results show that the intersubjective ratings of the students' interpreting performance can be quite adequately predicted from objective measures for members of the control group through multiple linear regression analysis but that such predictions are less successful in the case of the experimental group. The members of the control group received more favorable ratings from the expert judges as their speed of delivery was faster. Such a linear relationship was absent in the case of the experimental group. For the latter group it seemed as though the speed of delivery of the interpretation was most favorably rated if it was in the middle of the range. Less favorable ratings were obtained not only for slow delivery (as in the case of the control group) but also for excessively fast delivery by some members of the experimental group.

Chapter eight investigates the effects of explicit teaching of prosody on the performance of Farsi-English interpreter trainees, i.e., for inverse interpreting (from native into foreign language). Two groups of student interpreters were formed (8 female and 8 male students in each group). All were native speakers of Farsi who studied English translation and interpreting at the BA level at the State University of Arak, Iran. At the beginning of the program all the participants took a pre-test of general English proficiency. No significant differences in English language skills (TOEFL scores) could be established between the groups. The participants also took a pre-test to measure their basic interpreting skill. The control group was then taught interpreting skills by the ordinary curriculum in fifteen sessions, while the other, experimental group, spent part of the time on theoretical explanation and practical exercises emphasizing prosodic differences between Farsi and English. Both groups participated in the program for 15 sessions in five weeks with each session 90 minutes (all together 22 hours and 30 minutes). The control group received instruction and practice about the techniques of interpreting, different aspects of interpreting, and types of interpreting. The experimental group received not only the same type of instruction as provided to the control

group, be it in less time, but also awareness training on prosodic features (stress at word and at sentence level) of English and their effect on their performance for 20 minutes in each session. Three expert raters assessed quality measures of interpreting performance in both the pre-test and a post-test. All rating scales that pertain to prosodic aspects in the trainees' interpreting performance, proved susceptible to the explicit teaching of prosody. The results of the study showed that explicit teaching of prosody statistically did have a positive effect on the overall interpreting performance.

Chapter nine investigates the effect of directionality on the quality of consecutive interpreting between English and Farsi by interpreter trainees. This is done by comparing the results obtained in Chapter 3 for straight (*recto*) interpreting with those found in Chapter 8 for inverse (*verso*) interpreting. In each of the two experiments the group that had received prosody training outperformed the control group, especially on prosody-related rating scales such as pace (fluency). Moreover, the results showed better scores overall when interpreting was done into the mother tongue of trainees. Finally, the gain in performance by the experimental groups was larger for *recto* than for *verso* (i.e., from Farsi into English) interpreting.

Chapter ten investigates the effect of explicit vs. implicit prosody teaching on the quality of *verso* consecutive interpreting by Farsi-English interpreter trainees. Three groups of student interpreters were formed with 6 female and 6 male students in each group. All were native speakers of Farsi who studied English translation and interpreting at the BA level at the University of Applied Sciences, Tehran, Iran. No significant differences in English language skills (TOEFL scores) could be established between the groups. Participants took a pre-test of consecutive interpreting before starting the program. The control group listened to authentic audio tracks in English and did exercises in consecutive interpreting. The first experimental group received explicit instruction of English prosody and did exercises based on the theoretical explanation which was provided by their Iranian instructor. The second experimental group received implicit instruction of English prosody through the use of recasts (paraphrase exercises). The total instruction time was the same for all the groups, i.e., 10 hours. Students then took a post-test in *verso* consecutive interpreting. The results showed that explicit teaching of prosody had a significantly better effect on the overall quality of interpreting from Farsi into English compared with that of implicit prosody instruction.

Chapter eleven concludes the dissertation. The results of the experiments are summarized and the overall questions answered. Weaknesses in the set-up and execution of the experiments are identified and discussed. Suggestions for improvement and further research are presented. The chapter finishes with a discussion of the pedagogic implications of the research reported in the dissertation for the design of the (Iranian) interpreter training curriculum, the development of teaching methods and course materials, and the prospect of using computer-assisted language learning (CALL) technology to improve production and perception of English as a foreign language for Iranian interpreter trainees.