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DEVELOPING THE INTERPRETER'S EAR AND VOICE: THE IMPACT OF SHADOWING ON NOVICE CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETING SKILLS

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Abstract

This article analyzes the role of the shadowing technique in developing the foundational skills required for beginner consecutive interpreters. Consecutive interpreting is a complex cognitive activity that requires simultaneous listening, comprehension, memory retention, and oral reproduction. For novice interpreters, managing these processes often creates psychological pressure and cognitive overload. In this context, the study examines shadowing as an effective preparatory training method that helps learners gradually adapt to the demands of interpreting practice.

The research is based on qualitative analysis of scholarly literature in interpreting studies, psycholinguistics, and language pedagogy, as well as observations of interpreter training practices. The findings indicate that regular shadowing practice significantly improves listening comprehension, pronunciation accuracy, speech fluency, concentration, and short-term memory. In addition, the technique enhances learners' ability to process spoken information rapidly while simultaneously producing oral output, which is essential in consecutive interpreting. The study also reveals that shadowing contributes to reducing interpreting anxiety by increasing students' confidence and familiarity with continuous speech production.

The article concludes that shadowing serves not only as a linguistic exercise but also as a cognitive and psychological support mechanism in interpreter education. Therefore, integrating shadowing systematically into introductory interpreter training courses can strengthen the professional competencies of future interpreters and facilitate a smoother transition to more advanced interpreting tasks.

Keywords: shadowing technique, consecutive interpreting, interpreter training, oral translation, listening comprehension, speech fluency, pronunciation, short-term memory, cognitive processing, interpreting pedagogy, psycholinguistics, beginner interpreters.

Introduction

Consecutive interpreting is one of the most cognitively demanding forms of bilingual communication because interpreters must listen, comprehend, memorize, analyze, and reproduce information accurately within a limited period of time (Gile, 2009; Pöchhacker, 2016). Beginner consecutive interpreting students frequently encounter difficulties in sustaining attention, identifying and retaining key information, taking effective notes, and reproducing the source message accurately and fluently in the target language. These challenges are particularly evident during the early stages of

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interpreter training, when learners are still developing the cognitive and linguistic skills required for successful consecutive interpreting.

One of the most widely discussed techniques in interpreter education is the shadowing technique. Originally introduced in psycholinguistics and later adapted for interpreter training, shadowing involves listening to spoken discourse and repeating it immediately with minimal delay (Kadota, 2012). Shadowing, defined as the near-simultaneous repetition of speech (Lambert 1988), remains a widely used preparatory exercise in interpreter training. Unlike ordinary repetition exercises, shadowing requires active listening, attention control, pronunciation monitoring, and synchronization between auditory perception and speech production. Empirical studies generally report positive effects on listening, fluency, presentation, and simultaneous interpreting performance, alongside favourable learner attitudes (Hikmat & Hasan 2022; Nguyen et al. 2020). Cognitive research suggests that shadowing strengthens working memory and attentional control, approximating many of the processing demands of interpreting (Takeuchi et al. 2020). However, its pedagogical value remains contested: critics argue that it is allegedly inefficient and possibly "dangerous" because it favours simple repetition and lacks the semantic processing and reformulation central to interpreting (Thiéry 1989; Seleskovitch & Lederer 1989; Gillies 2013). However, recent scholarship tends to position shadowing as a useful but limited technique, most effective when integrated into a broader training framework.

The shadowing technique has become particularly relevant in the training of novice interpreters because it creates a bridge between passive listening and active oral production. Through continuous repetition of authentic speech, students develop fluency, improve pronunciation, strengthen memory retention, and increase processing speed (Hamada, 2021). In consecutive interpreting training, these abilities, together with attention to detail and the capacity to identify key information, are essential, as interpreters must accurately process incoming information while preparing for oral delivery.

Oral delivery is also likely to improve, as interpreting students learn to attend to such aspects as logical pausing and appropriate stress, thereby making their presentation in the target language more coherent, fluent, and engaging. They also develop the ability to connect with an audience through clarity, confidence and natural flow. Students focus on expressing ideas simply and persuasively, rather than using overly complex language, ensuring that the core message has a clear impact and, where appropriate, motivates action.

The purpose of this article is to investigate the role of the shadowing technique in improving the efficiency of beginner consecutive interpreting training. The study focuses on how shadowing contributes to the development of oral interpreting skills, cognitive flexibility, and listening-speaking coordination during the early stages of interpreter education.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design based on theoretical analysis, comparative methodology, and pedagogical observation. Academic literature on interpreter training, psycholinguistics, and oral translation pedagogy was analyzed to identify the pedagogical functions of the shadowing technique (Moser-Mercer, 2008; Gile, 2009).

The research also compares traditional listening-based interpreter exercises with shadowing-centered training approaches in order to evaluate their effectiveness in developing beginner interpreting competence. Particular attention was given to the following training dimensions:

- Listening comprehension
- Pronunciation and articulation
- Speech fluency
- Short-term memory development

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• Attention and concentration
• Cognitive processing speed

The analysis was conducted through examination of interpreter training practices commonly used in university-level oral translation courses. Examples of classroom implementation and student performance observations were used to identify the practical advantages of shadowing during the initial stage of consecutive interpreting training.

Results

The findings demonstrate that the shadowing technique has a significant positive impact on the development of oral interpreting skills among beginner interpreting students.

Improvement of Listening Comprehension

One of the primary benefits of shadowing is the enhancement of active listening ability. Students practicing shadowing regularly demonstrated improved recognition of speech patterns, intonation, and discourse structure. According to Rost (2011), active listening exercises strengthen learners' ability to process spoken language in real time, which is essential for interpreting performance.

Development of Pronunciation and Speech Fluency

Shadowing significantly improves pronunciation because learners imitate native speech rhythm, stress, and intonation directly from authentic audio materials (Harmer, 2007). In addition, shadowing improves fluency by reducing hesitation pauses and increasing automaticity in oral production. Students gradually become more confident in producing continuous speech without long interruptions.

Enhancement of Short-Term Memory

Consecutive interpreting heavily depends on short-term memory because interpreters must retain information before reproducing it in another language. The findings indicate that students who practiced shadowing showed improved ability to retain and reproduce information accurately. This result supports previous studies on interpreter skill acquisition that emphasize the relationship between repetition and memory strengthening (Moser-Mercer, 2008).

Increased Cognitive Processing Speed

Another important result concerns cognitive flexibility and processing speed. Shadowing forces learners to process incoming speech rapidly while simultaneously producing oral output. As students become accustomed to processing speech quickly, they experience reduced cognitive overload during interpreting tasks (Setton & Dawrant, 2016).

Reduction of Psychological Anxiety

The study also revealed that shadowing reduces interpreting anxiety. Many beginner interpreters feel nervous when speaking continuously in front of others. Through repeated oral practice, learners gradually develop self-confidence and familiarity with oral performance situations. As a result, students become more comfortable speaking continuously in front of an audience.

Discussion

The findings confirm that shadowing serves as an effective preparatory technique for beginner consecutive interpreting training. The results are consistent with earlier studies emphasizing that interpreting competence develops gradually through systematic oral and cognitive training (Pöchhacker, 2016).

From a psycholinguistic viewpoint, shadowing strengthens the connection between auditory perception and speech production. The technique activates automatic language processing mechanisms and improves phonological decoding abilities. As learners repeat authentic speech in real time, they gradually internalize pronunciation patterns, syntactic structures, and prosodic features (Kadota, 2012).

From a pedagogical perspective, shadowing creates a gradual transition from listening exercises to

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interpreting tasks. Traditional interpreter training often introduces consecutive interpreting too early, causing students to experience cognitive overload. Shadowing reduces this problem by isolating specific intepreting sub-skills before students engage in full translation tasks (Gillies, 2017).

The study also demonstrates that shadowing contributes to the development of interpreter-specific competencies such as divided attention, rapid processing, and speech coordination. These competencies are essential for successful consecutive interpreting because interpreters must manage listening, comprehension, memory, and oral production simultaneously.

However, the effectiveness of shadowing depends on proper implementation. Training materials should correspond to students' language proficiency levels, and speech difficulty should increase progressively. In addition, shadowing should be combined with summarization, paraphrasing, and note-taking exercises in order to develop broader interpreting competence.

Although shadowing is highly beneficial at the beginner stage, it should not replace actual interpreting practice entirely. Instead, it functions most effectively as a foundational training method that prepares students for more advanced interpreting tasks.

Conclusion

The shadowing technique plays a crucial role in the efficient training of consecutive interpreting during the initial stage of oral interpreting skill development. The technique enhances listening comprehension, pronunciation, fluency, memory retention, concentration, and cognitive processing speed while simultaneously reducing interpreting anxiety.

The study demonstrates that shadowing provides beginner interpreters with essential preparatory experience before engaging in complex bilingual interpreting tasks. By improving coordination between listening and speaking processes, shadowing strengthens the foundational competencies required for successful consecutive interpreting.

Therefore, interpreter training programs should integrate shadowing systematically into introductory oral translation courses. Future research may further investigate the long-term effects of shadowing on professional interpreting performance and explore its application in multilingual interpreter education contexts.

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