Prof. Kilian G. Seeber

I. Simultaneous Interpreting: A Short History of Nearly Everything

Simultaneous interpreting first saw the light of day in the early 1920s when E. Filene and A. Gordon-Finlay, using early telephone technology, developed the first so-called telephonic interpreting equipment. Over a half a century later simultaneous interpreting has all but replaced consecutive interpreting in international conferences.

In spite of that, simultaneous interpreting as a profession is still shrouded in mystery, and the task itself appears to have lost little of its original potential to astonish. More than that, it is still the object of misconceptions and surrounded by popular views and dogmata. The importance of bilingualism, the issue of directionality, the relevance of language-specific factors and the role of visual input and physical presence are only some of the unresolved and hotly debated issues in the simultaneous interpreting world today.

In this presentation I will take a closer look at simultaneous interpreting, when and how it was introduced, and how and why it has become firmly established as the main interpreting mode at multilingual conferences. Since simultaneous interpreting was made possible by the integration of both technical and human factors, I will provide an overview of both the technical and human requirements for the successful performance of the task. In order to do so, I will try to bring together some of the principal findings from the field of interpreting research with the most relevant results from the field of psycholinguistics.

II. Simultaneous Interpreting: Theories, Models, and Data

Simultaneous interpreters' ability to listen and speak at the same time and to smoothly navigate between two or more languages has long fascinated the uninitiated and intrigued those of us who are interested in the way in which the human brain achieves such a feat. When attempting to describe the cognitive architecture enabling this process few authors can get by without relying on the notion of working memory and the amount of an underlying commodity to fuel the latter. This finite resource and its allocation is readily used to explain phenomena we observe during the simultaneous interpreting process.

In this presentation I will address the example of a widely used theory of interpreting, present the models that have been proposed as its representations and compare them with some empirical data that has been gathered over the years. The main objective of this exercise will be to take a closer look at the extent to which theory, models and data have interacted. More specifically, I will attempt to identify those areas in which both models and theories have resisted being informed by data, and suggest possible modifications to the theory to accommodate them.

III. Simultaneous Interpreting: Quintessential Multimodal Processing

ICTs have the potential to shape and perhaps even revolutionize the way in which we communicate. Relatively recent technologies such as Skype (released in 2003), Facebook (released in 2004), and Twitter (released in 2006) are a case in point: inconceivable only a decade ago, they have turned into household names and conditioned the way in which we interact both socially and professionally. The same applies to the hardware supporting them, such as smart phones and tablet computers. It stands to reason that these technologies, that condition our communicative behavior from an early age, will have a repercussion on the way in which new generations of interpreters react to an increasingly technologically enhanced workplace, including teleconference interpreting (TCI) and remote interpreting (RI).

Already today professional interpreters are routinely confronted with a wide range of input channels as content at conferences is delivered using multimedia devices such as slide presentations, animated videos and video prompters. What is more, they use their own devices, such as laptop and tablet computers, in real time. Consequently, modern simultaneous interpreting can be viewed as a multi-modal information-processing task requiring the allocation of finite cognitive resources to different sub-tasks that interfere with each other to varying degrees.

The effect of such multi-modal communicative environments on a cognitively demanding task such as simultaneous interpreting is still largely unknown. Crucially, much of the data gathered in experiments on teleconference and remote interpreting predates the introduction of the aforementioned ICTs, raising the issue of their demographic validity.

In this presentation I will focus on the visual component of communication, more specifically on the visual component of simultaneous conference interpreting. My overall objective will be to share with you experimental and survey data with the potential to inform and maybe debunk some rather persistent myths concerning the processing of visual information during comprehension and simultaneous interpreting.

IV. Interpreting research: The right tool for the right job

Scholarly research into interpreting is a relatively young discipline that started only a half a century ago. In this presentation will attempt to provide a general overview of different methodological approaches that have been applied to the study of the interpreting process identifying their respective strengths and weaknesses.

In particular, I will focus on the contribution experimental research has made to the field, discuss its potential and shortcomings, and identify some of the most promising new methods. In doing so, I hope to convey the basic idea that while many research approaches and methods may be available, what matters, is choosing the right tool for the job.

Bio sketch

Kilian Seeber holds a BA in Translation and Interpreting and an MA in Conference Interpreting from the University of Vienna and a graduate degree and PhD in interpreting research from the University of Geneva. After his post-doctoral research in psycholinguistics at the University of York, he returned to the University of Geneva, where he was appointed Professor at the Multilingual Interpreting Department at the *Faculté de traduction et d'interprétation* (FTI). Since 2011 he has been responsible for *LaborInt*, the FTI's Laboratory for Research in Interpreting.

Kilian's main research interest has been in cognitive aspects of language processing, particularly in anticipation,working memory and multimodal processing. He has authored several journal articles and co-edited a special issue of the International Journal of Bilingualism on Cognitive Processes in Simultaneous Interpreters with Teresa Signorelli. Kilian is a practicing conference interpreter, accredited with the European Institutions and a member of the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC).