

## Self-repair in Simultaneous Interpretation

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**Abstract:** This research attempts to investigate self-repairs used by trainee interpreters (students) in consecutive interpreting. Based on the collected data from the eight postgraduates majoring in interpretation, the study will identify different types of self-repair and explore possible reasons for self-repair made by students, in hope of providing useful suggestions for interpreting practice.

### 1. Introduction

In the process of interpreting, self-repair could be regarded as one of the phenomena in language transfer. In the past decades, a proliferation of studies on self-repair has focused on monolingual conditions, most of which were conducted without considering the use of self-repair in bilingual situations. In other words, little work has been done on the use of self-repair in interpretation. Previous studies are found to focus on the use of self-repair from oral language perspective. The existing self-repair studies in interpreting filed are centering such topics as note-taking, listening obstacles, comprehension skills etc. Few findings are generated on non-fluent phenomena such as repetitions, pauses and others.

### 2. Purpose and significance

There is a prevalent use of self-repair in both simultaneous and consecutive interpreting. However, previous studies pay little attention to the use of self-repair in consecutive interpreting. Therefore, the current study will attempt to investigate self-repairs used by trainee interpreters (students) in consecutive interpreting. Based on the collected data, the study will identify different types of self-repair and explore possible reasons for self-repair made by students, in hope of providing useful suggestions for interpreting practice.

### 3. Literature Review: Self-repair in Interpreting

Many researchers have conducted relevant self-repair research to investigate some phenomena existing in verbal communications. Levelt (1983) developed the taxonomy model of self-repairs and proposed different features of repairs. Petite (2005) initiated an observation about the use of self-repair in interpreting. Based on her collection of eight interpreting samples, she generalized the self-repair phenomenon and constructed the types of self-repair. The taxonomy of her self-repair is the further development of Levelt's, which is applicable in interpreting field. However, Petite's construction of the self-repair fails to provide in-depth description and discussion of each repair model.

In the second language repair research, Kormos (2000) found that speakers will initiate "Monitoring and self-repair act" when they realized the inappropriate expressions or the mistakes in speaking. She regarded the self-repair as the representation of monitoring mechanism from psycholinguistic aspect. Her argumentation reflects a fact that speakers may spend much efforts in checking the speech uttered

both internally and externally. Such ideas could account for the errors undetected by speakers in their utterances.

Relevant studies could be found in China. Under the guidance of Levelt's speech production idea, Zhao (2003) conducted a case study on the use of repairs in Chinese to English simultaneous interpreting. With the reference of Levelt's classification of repair, Wang (2007) tested the use of self-repairs from English to Chinese simultaneous interpreting. He claimed that compensate strategy of interpreting is not limited to correction aspect, and it depends on the monitoring mechanism initiated by the interpreters.

Up to now, some studies on self-repair in consecutive interpreting have been conducted in China. Li (2011) investigated trainee interpreters' use of self-repairs in consecutive interpreting. Based on the collection of thirty-one samples from trainees, he found that self-repair is closely related with self-monitoring mechanism. Besides, he identified the types of self-repair on the basis of Kormos' (1999) taxonomy of repairs in the second language learning.

Similar researches have been conducted by Zeng & Hong (2012), who concentrated on the trainee interpreter's performance in consecutive interpreting contest. After the analysis of trainees' frequencies of repairs, he found that the choice of the type of repair used by students depends on the interpreting task. His study paves the way for the future study on trainees' use of repair and monitoring mechanism in interpreting activities. However, it fails to provide sufficient information on the follow-up interviews with trainees who will explain the underlying reasons for the adoption of self-repairs.

Tan (2015) conducted corpus-based study on the English major's use of self-repairs in consecutive interpreting. In comparison with previous studies, Tan categorized students into different levels and examined the relationship between language proficiency and repair. Based on his classification of repair type (covert and overt), he found that students with high level of English tend to use overt repairs. Tan's study serves as significant part in consecutive training, which helps trainee interpreters enhance language transferring and interpreting skills. However, due to the limited data information, the reasons of using different types of repairs are unknown.

#### **4. Methodology**

The current study will mainly address the following two questions:

- (1) What types of self-repair are used by trainee interpreters in consecutive interpreting (English to Chinese)?
- (2) What are the reasons for self-repair by trainee interpreters in consecutive interpreting (English to Chinese)?

#### **5. Participants**

Eight MTI postgraduates were selected to participate in the current study. They are all in their second-year interpreting studies from Shandong University. In the past years, they have received systematical training in this field and have built profound knowledge of interpreting theories. In addition, they are all familiar with various kinds of topics encountered in the real interpreting working environment due to their social interpreting practices in spare time. Therefore, they could be regarded as trainee interpreters in the current study.

#### **6. Procedures of Data collection**

The selection of the interpreting material has been discussed with other teachers who teach interpreting course together with my postgraduate teachers. Under the guidance of them, the author found the materials online which are suitable for students to practice and double-checked the material

with teachers to make sure the validity of the content. Then the material was used in consecutive interpreting course to investigate participants' use of self-repairs. In the process of the experiments, participants were allowed to take notes. The material lasts 15 minutes and 30 seconds, and there will be one-minute interval for participants to interpret at every 30 seconds. Their productions will be recorded simultaneously.

The data were collected from students' classroom practices in consecutive interpreting course. In the process of course, eight participants were recorded when practicing the consecutive interpreting tasks. The eight participants' recordings last 2 hours and minutes, and then all recordings were transcribed into words. The transcriptions of their practices were employed to identify the feature of self-repair used by them.

After eight participants completed their practices, interviews would be conducted based on their performances in the previous tasks. The recording of participants' interpreting productions and their notes were used to help participants answer the questions. The use of recordings and notes in the interview helps participants recall their mental process in the previous interpreting and provides qualitative explanations of the repair used by them. The design of this interview is helpful for exploring the factors that influence participants' interpreting productions. It also provides sufficient reasons why self-repair is used by participants.

## 7. Materials

Considering the trainee's language proficiency and levels, the content of materials is closely related with the relevant knowledge and skills of what they have learned in class. After interpreting tasks, the interviews were conducted on the basis of the prepared questions.

- (1) What makes it difficult to interpret the current text?
- (2) What aspects affect your current interpretation?
- (3) Why do you make self-repair in the current interpretation?

## 8. Results

### 8.1 Type of self-repair

Based on the self-repair taxonomy proposed in the current study, Self-repair types used by participants are information repair, error repair, appropriateness repair and failure, of which the first type can be subdivided into same information repair and different information repair. Since the interpreting examples will involve bilingual versions, here they are all deleted. But the frequency numbers of each type are clearly noted.

### 8.2 Distribution of the repair

Type of repair		Amount	Percentage	
Same information	repetition	55	46.1%	28.5
	restatement	34		17.6
Different information	deletion	20	37.8%	10.3
	adding new information	53		27.5
Error repair	vocabulary repair	16	10.4%	8.3
	phonetic repair	4		2.1
Appropriateness repair		9	4.7%	
Failure		2	1%	
Total		193		

As indicated in the above Table, same information repair is the most frequently used type by participants, which accounts for 46.1 % of all the repairs. The second commonly used type is the different information repair, which occupies 37.8 % of all repairs. Error repair ranks the third place with the percentage of 10.4% in the overall collected repairs. In addition, appropriateness repair and failure are seldomly used by participants with percentage of 4.7 % and 1% respectively.

### **8.3 Reasons for self-repairs**

Based on the data collected and the previous research (Petite, 2005), the reasons of repair used by participants can be generalized into three points: Bilingual problems, skills problems and other reasons. The use of interviews after the interpreting activity help seek out the reasons of repairs used by participants.

#### **8.3.1 Bilingual problems**

Participants are prone to make mistakes in transferring source language to target language and they may adopt certain repairs. In the interview, when asked why the participants adopt repair, four participants said, “their thinking pattern of native language will influence their interpreting production in the whole process of the activity.”

#### **8.3.2 Skills problems.**

Interpreters with relatively poor skills and limited energy will fail to deliver speaker’s intention accurately. In the interview section, when asked participants what makes it difficult to interpret the current text, most students mentioned several factors, such as their difficulty in understanding of the source language, note-taking problems etc.

#### **8.3.3 Others**

Based on the interview, there also exist other factors that may account for the use of repairs in interpreting. Due to the feature of consecutive interpreting, participants may experience fluctuate moods, such as anxiety, nerves, pressure etc. Moreover, the unfamiliarity with the topic will frustrate the participants and make them feel less confident.

### **8.4 Discussion**

In terms of the distribution of repairs used by the participants, the most common one is same information repair, and under its subcategory, the repetition is the most frequently used repair type. Such findings in the current study differ from that of Petite (2005) who found that error repair is the most common used type of repair in English (L1) to German (L2). In comparison with her study, the current one focuses on the repair phenomenon in English(L2) to Chinese (L1) in consecutive interpreting. Based on the collected data both in recordings and interviews, two reasons may explain such phenomenon.

Firstly, the participants use repetition to help them prepare for the ongoing utterance, which then enables them to organize the upcoming expressions properly. In the interview, when asked what aspects affect the current interpreting, four participants said their limited energy will generate unsatisfactory production. Effort model will be involved in consecutive interpreting, and the interpreters needs to allocate their energy in limited situation and supply. The performance of the interpreters is closely related with their energy.

Secondly, most repetition in the data are the one or two words. The repetition of the same words will make listeners notice the importance of the upcoming utterance and help listeners understand the interpreters’ information. Thus, repetition in this sense can be regarded as the reminder for the importance of the following utterance by the interpreters.

This study found that adding new information repair ranks the second in the self-repair types. It may be due to the participants' target language proficiency. In consecutive interpreting setting, the interpreters whose native language is Chinese will resort to Chinese thinking pattern to identify the difficulties encountered in interpreting. Thus, they will realize the incomplete message and add new information based on their interpreting competence. Moreover, the complexity of the interpreting competence can be divided into bilingual skills, extra-linguistic knowledge, and interpreting skills (Wang, 2012), which will hinder interpreters' performance.

The current study also found that participants sometimes use monotonous editing terms like "er". As a matter of fact, this phenomenon may be related with the personal habits in their speaking. Moreover, in English there existed many editing words like "then", "and" etc. However, little could be found in Chinese. Therefore, participants only adopt "er" in their utterance. In the interviews, five interpreters mentioned that fluency is of importance in interpreting. That is to say, the use of editing term "er" may be regarded as disfluent utterance in interpreting. Therefore, the participants use the editing terms not frequently.

## 9. Conclusion

This study aims to investigate the use of self-repair by trainee interpreters in consecutive interpreting. Under the influence of Levelt (1983) and Kormos (1998), a practical self-repair taxonomy was proposed in the consecutive interpreting settings. Based on the data analysis, the findings are listed as follows:

Firstly, trainee interpreters frequently adopt same information repair, and under this category, the type of repetition is prevalent in comparison with restatement. Moreover, the different information repair ranks the second which indicates that interpreter's tendency to make their interpretation production more accurately. In terms of Error Repair, participants are likely to make error in vocabulary.

Secondly, the overall data reflect that repetition and different information repair are the two main parts used by participants. They use such types of repair to make sure fluent utterance in interpreting. Thirdly, the participants use some monotonous editing terms in interpreting, such as "er". Lastly, the different selection of self-repair by participants come down to several reasons like bilingual problems and lack of sufficient skills.

When the current investigation is limited in itself with in a small scale of participants, future studies are suggested to expand the data for more valid and sufficient information in this field. This study only focuses on the consecutive interpreting from English to Chinese, thus it will be better to investigate the repair phenomenon in reverse direction (from Chinese to English). Moreover, further explorations about reasons for using self-repair should continue to facilitate the interpreting training.

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