

Simultaneous Interpreting with Text: A Study in the UN Context

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Multilingual meetings of organisations in the United Nations (UN) system constitute a unique work environment for interpreters. Simultaneous interpreters there are accustomed to working with scripted texts in the booth while mediating communicative interaction among participants, more specifically, between a speaker reading a speech (e.g. in English) and delegates listening to its simultaneous interpretation (e.g. in Chinese). The availability of the script for visual source-text reception, and the dynamic interplay between the printed text and the speaker's (typically fast) oral delivery present opportunities as well as challenges to the interpreters' cognitive processing and thus impact the spoken target text received by the listener. My research investigates interpreting processes in this specific environment on the basis of authentic data from two UN conferences in Vienna and Geneva. In particular, it seeks to establish how the working mode of simultaneous interpreting (SI) with text and its inferred effects on the interpreter's cognitive processes impact the quality of the interpreter's output. Based on a corpus of some four dozen English speeches and their simultaneous interpretations into Chinese, my research tests the hypothesis that performance in SI with text will be superior to that in SI without text with regard to content (accuracy and completeness) but poorer in terms of delivery (prosody). For this purpose, the corpus-based analysis will be triangulated with a qualitative case study on the work environment of UN interpreters as well as a web-based survey eliciting the response of Chinese interpretation users. The empirical findings speak to the difference in cognitive processing implied by working with or without the written text in the booth, and hence to the impact of interpreters' working conditions on the quality of service delivery in this specific institutional and situational environment.