

When the going gets tough the tough start slipping: phonological errors in simultaneous signed media interpreting

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Whereas speakers make slips of the tongue under cognitive load, signers make slips of the hand. Simultaneous media interpreting involves numerous problem triggers (Gile 1995) that can cause cognitive overload, including fast pace of message delivery, incoherent speakers (interviewees), disruptive background noise and fatigue. To date, the few existing empirical studies of cognitive overload in interpreting have focused mainly on the lag time between source and target message delivery (Defranq 2015), or on the types of phonological slips (Defranq & Plevoets 2018). However, due to the previous lack of empirical corpus-driven data, this is the first study of cognitive overload to be undertaken for sign language interpreting. Based on a corpus of simultaneously signed interpretations of news bulletins, the study explores phonological errors made by the interpreters in relation to the above-mentioned environmental problem-triggers. The results indicate that while phonological errors do reflect the coherence of the source message, they are more likely to occur when interpreters fall behind and try to catch up, and thereby reflect the increased demands on working memory.

Keywords: phonological errors, working memory, signed language interpreting, media interpreting, simultaneous interpreting, corpus-driven interpreting studies