# Non-Linguistic Aspects of Interpreting with Reference to English and Kurdish

*A Research by*

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## Abstract

Interpreting as a profession has become the center of interest and focus for many linguists, translation scholars, translators, and professionals. Interpreting has played a vital role in bridging the gap and maintaining relationships among people of different languages. The output of interpreting, unlike written translation is entirely oral leaving behind no written proof. Interpreting is an activity or a process which consists of the facility of oral and sign language communicated either consecutively or simultaneously between two or more speakers who are not speaking the same language. Interpretation is the act of transposing a message from one language to another immediately in real time.

The study sheds light mostly upon non- linguistic factors in the process of interpreting which can be of no less important than the linguistic ones. The aim of the study is to provide an overview of interpreting in general with a detailed description of the non- linguistic strategies or skills from the perspective of interpreting process. Bearing these in tactics in mind, the interpreter tackles the interpreting problems and difficulties in a more skillful way.

Key Words: Non- Linguistic Aspects, Interpreting, Paralinguistics Aspects, Verbal and non- verbal messages.

**Introduction**

Interpreting is a relatively new area of research that has been often subsumed under the heading of Translation. The Non- linguistics aspects of interpreting concern with the analysis of interpreting process and the basic interpreting skills. The analysis of the interpreting process analyses the problems and factors that may affect the quality of interpreting in different procedures, then to focus on the discussion of the main categories of interpreting skills and how to overcome those problems.

The current study tackles the issue of interpreting mainly discussing the non- linguistic factors involved in ascertaining meaning. The identification of meaning in the process of interpreting is also discussed focusing on the interpreter's awareness of the non- linguistic elements. The lexical items in isolation and in context is followed by the input and the output switches depending on the speakers' intention. The importance of the interpreter's role in practice is explained together with the problem areas.

The process of interpreting in the classroom environment is yet another issue that is discussed in this study provided with the problematic situations and difficulties. The question: why interpreting is important? Is an answer given to serve the aim of the study. The data given to the students in class interpretation that includes those topics chosen for interpretation. Finally, the recordings of the students' performances in interpreting the chosen topics is provided to reach the conclusions arrived at after the analysis.

**Non- Linguistic Factors Involved in Ascertaining Meaning**

Although translation is written and interpretation is oral, many of the principles of translation theory can be applied to the process of interpretation. The study focusses on interpreting. However, some points of translation theory are relevant to the ideas and analyses presented in this study. Catford (1965, p. 88), while emphasizing on translation theory in his work, refers in passing to "spoken-spoken translation".

Catford also refers to context as an extra- textual situational phenomenon which is "linguistically relevant", and to "co-text" as an item present within the text

which provides information and clarifies the ambiguities. The term "context" is used here for both the linguistic and extralinguistic elements which contribute to the meaning and understanding.

In the process of interpretation, interpreters listen, analyze, translate, and speak with a lag of only seconds/ words separating the original source language (SL) version and the target language (TL) rendition. The goal of this complicated process is to communicate a message from the SL to the TL with minimal analysis time. Thus, interpreting is not a simple process of substituting a TL word/ phrase/ clause/ sentence in a word- for- word configuration. Rather it is:

1. Understanding the meaning behind the SL words, and
2. Expressing that meaning in the TL.                         (Nida, 1982)

Catford (1965, p, 20 defines Translation as "… the replacement of a textual material in one language (SL) by an equivalent textual material in another language (TL)". In both processes of interpretation and translation meaning is often, if not usually conveyed in the TL through the use of words/ phrases/ sentences which are completely different from those of the SL (Lyons, 1984, Seleskovitch, 1983). Jakobson refers to this phenomenon as "equivalence in difference".

Moreover, a phrase in the SL may be replaced by a single word or a clause in the TL and vice versa. It is important to understand that interpreting the message of an utterance and finding word equivalents for the lexical items of an utterance are not the same thing.

This study mostly examines the non- linguistic (extralinguistic) factors involved in ascertaining meaning, focusing on the selected contributions of general linguistic theory, interpretation and translation theory, and pragmatics to the study of interpretation process. To illustrate this, one can draw from his personal experience as well as from performances of the students interpreting at speeches, conferences, and during practice sessions.

**Identification of Meaning in Interpreting Process.**
**The Interpreter's Awareness of Non- linguistic Element.**

What contribute to the meaning of an utterances is not only their phonological, syntactic, and semantic aspects, but in a much larger and perhaps more important sense, it is the context in which the speech occurs. Context is a

strong determinant of how the syntactic and phonological patterns of utterances are perceived, analyzed, and understood (Catford, 1965), Lakoff (1982), Schweda Nichdson and den Tuinder (1993).

The identification and analysis of meaning have long been the backbone of interpretation and translation research. As in general meaning analysis, the process of interpretation relies not only on the linguistic aspects of an information available to the interpreter in any given context (Lederer, 1987, Schweda Nichdson 1985).

Understandably, pragmatics, also, plays a very important role in the process of interpretation. Interpreters are under constant pressure to perform quickly and accurately the task. In addition, processing all the incoming linguistic information, the context is ever present in the interpreter's mind, very importantly, by taking into account information which is forthcoming from both linguistic and non-linguistic sources, interpreters are able to resolve the ambiguities (Lyons 1984, Selekovitch 1985). In addition, their understating of the speaker's argument development becomes more and more clear as the speech proceeds (Henderson, 1988). Uhlenberck (1985, p. 192) summarizes the process which applies well to interpretation and non- interpretation situation:

"The final interpretation of a sentence by the hearer turns out to be the outcome of weighing and integrating a variety of cognitive data: factual and emotional information inherent in the sentence itself, together with extralingual information about the speaker, about the culture in which the speaker and the hearer are living. Analysis of all these factors is needed for understanding how the semantic aspect of language functions".

**Lexical Items in Isolation and in Context**

Components of language, other than semantics as well as extralinguistic data, contribute to understanding. For instance, one cannot isolate a lexical item such as "card" of instance and assign it one meaning which fits all contexts. Wold (1983, p. 42) states that when one word is presented to an individual in an artificial situation … the direction of the processing of different individuals will vary partly because the meaning processes is affected by different background factors. Jakendoff (1989, p. 139) writes "a word meaning … is a large heterogenous

collection dealing with form, function, purpose, personality or whatever else is salient".

Seleskoutich (1978) refers to the many out-of- context meanings for a single word as "linguistic meaning". Each is valid in and of itself as it stands alone (i.e. the numerous dictionary entries for a word). In the sentence".:
"She handed him her card"; the reader, listener does not know which kind of card is the referent. If five different people read or hear this sentence, it is possible that the five different meanings will be assigned to the lexical item "card".

Lyons (1984, p. 179) states that one can fason identical utterances- inscriptions without having produced the same sentence. However, place the above sentence in a context, and it takes on various, situationally- specific meanings) i.e. at the library, it's a library card, at the meeting, it is a business card, at a restaurant, it is a credit card, at a stationary store, it is a greeting card being purchased, and so on.

Thus, out of context, in the above sentence evokes numerous different referents for the card. Catford, in this regard says: "The contextual meaning of an item is the groupment of the relevant features with which it is related".


**Input Analysis and Output Switches**

Regarding input analysis and output switches, interpreters extract ideas from SL utterances and expressions in the TL. Interpreters should activate their receptive competence in one language and, only a second or two later sometimes even more quickly- utilize their performative competence in another. Interpreters are constantly required to perceive and comprehend new data while they are producing the material which has already been processed and understood. This procedure results because interpreters maintain a certain lag time behind the speaker. Lag time allows the interpreter to perceive, analyze, and comprehend before speaking. Interpretation is truly remarkable example of the brain's information- processing capabilities.

The amount of lag time varies from one interpreter to another. In general, though interpreters usually maintain, somehow, a lag of 5 to 10 words and/ or several seconds behind the speaker in interpretation. Worthy of note is that interpreting does not strictly maintain the same lag time through- out the course

of speech. Some materials because of their difficult or complicated nature may require a longer lag, while other parts of speech may be more straight forward. In the later case, interpreters often follow at a shorter distance.

The linguistic and extralinguistic data available to the interpreter provide a constantly evolving system of checks and balances upon which subsequent assessments and analyses are based.

**Speaker Intention**

With relevance to the interpretation process, is the factor of speaker intention. Pergnier (1992), refers to the "message- meaning" as that which is intended by the speaker and relies heavily on context. Uhlenbeck (1978), writes of a "maker- sense" principle in which listeners assume that what the speaker is uttering makes sense, given this pre- analysis frame of mind, listeners then interpret input, taking into consideration all the information available to them to ascertain the meaning expressed by the speaker. Sometimes, interpreters are faced with an ambiguity of a comprehension problem. When this occurs, they should utilize the "makes- sense" principle and take advantage of the linguistic and extralinguistic cues available to them to produce a complete accurate interpretation.

**Interpretation in Practice**

After examining various linguistic and interpretation theories, it is wise, here, to produce some practical applications of the theoretical data to the interpretation process. The examples will be taken from class formal actual situations in order to illustrate the intentions of theory and practice.

1. Analyzing the situation:
   Before a conference or meeting begins, interpreters attempt to acquire pertinent information which might aid in preparatory analysis of the situation at hand and, if possible, the goal or the reason for organizing the meeting (Lederer, 1987).
   The current example, clearly, illustrates that background information can be in valuable when preparing for a conference task. As a result, before the

meetings even began, the interpreters already knew much about the context in which they would be working (Pergnier, 1982).

2. Who comprise the audience:

Another element of the conference situation which can often be investigated prior to beginning of the meeting is to make up of the audience. Why is knowing who will be listening so important? It is quite common for the audience members at international conferences to share in the same field as the speaker. Consequently, there may not be comprehension problems, because those who are listening share a common intellectual background and understand all of the terminology and concepts that are treated. However, this is not always the case. Perhaps there are some individuals in the audience who do not yet possess sophisticated knowledge of the subject. If the interpreters are aware of this situation in advance, they can better serve their audience. If there is time, the interpreters can clarify or explain some of the particularly complicated and difficult points. Specialists, for instance, use acronym with which they are very familiar. Sometimes, however, these individuals offer no explanation of what the acronyms represent to their audience.

**Problem Areas**

Missed material, lack of knowledge, faculty anticipation and isolated lexical items.

The following are some examples that illustrate interpreter's contextual awareness and how it was manifested in actual interpreting situations:

- When interpreters are uncertain about what they have heard, or have missed some information together, they should rely on context to "fill in the blank".

- The interpreter could have relied on the context of the current speech, as well as the general awareness of monetary fluctuations in his long- term memory. Interpretation mistakes often appear to result from a lack of pertinent knowledge on the part of the interpreter. Knowing the material is the real key to providing a quality interpretation.

- Any listener has a natural tendency to interpret and analyze subsequent words, phrases, and so on, in terms of what has already been heard during speech conversation.
- Once the meaning is analyzed, the interpreter predicts what is to follow, or perhaps the interpreter's pragmatic expectations about what the message would be affected the phonetic unit.

**The Process of Interpreting in the Classroom Environment**

The Departments of English have put translation as a subject in the undergraduate curriculum as a compulsory subject taught to all English programs in universities and colleges alongside with other subjects. Interpreting, basically, is a process of translating the meaning of the source language into the receptor language in a verbal way. This process may only occur when someone acts as an interpreter to transfer the meaning of a message directly from the mouth of a speaker, from a tape player, from s radio, from a CD/VCD player, from a T. V. or from other sources of verbal messages in a source language to a listener or an audience of a receptor.

In order to perform such a challenging task professionally and responsibly, one should have an adequate command of the receptor language in their linguistic and non- linguistic aspects.

It is important to bring students close to both English and Kurdish real- life environments and exposed them to different discourse genres and different dialects and accents.

The first step is to warm up activities to preparing the students to move up to the other step. Up to this level, students are exposed to a semi- real life situation where they are listening to different English native speaker dialects and non- native speaker accents either through the prepared tapes, CDs and VCD's and they are also listening to different Kurdish discourse genres.

The other step is the most challenging one for the student because each student will demonstrate his/ her strategy and capability in performing an interpreting work in a set- up real- life situation. Such capabilities can be acquired consciously and unconsciously through a process of learning, training, and experiencing in a formal set-up situation and in a real-life situation.

**Why is Interpretation Important for Students?**

Not only will the interpreter benefit from being in the actual setting and being able to read facial expressions, etc., but the students will be able to build a personal relationship with the interpreter. The following points are some of the problematic situations and difficulties

1. The problem lies in not having a certain sound lab or specific lab for interpreting process.
2. Not having a specific course for interpreting within the 4$^{th}$ year curriculum program.
3. Problems of having large classes in which students have no equal chance for practicing in such an oral task.
4. Lacking to have specialized staff members for teaching interpreting.
5. No chance to visiting interpretion centers in our area for the students.
6. Students are of different levels regarding English language mastery and performance.
7. The task of oral rendering is mostly embarrassing and complicated the interpretor, needs to be tactful in performing the task.
8. Having no interest somehow in rendering language of media, journalism and political texts or topics.

Thus, the role of the interpreter, here, is not only to convey the words between the participants in the communication process, but they also need to make sure that the goal of the lecture/ lesson is clear and that all important aspects are properly understood. The interpreter, in this case, helps fostering social interaction and assists the student with hearing impairment in blending with their classmates.

In the actual interpreting process, the speaker should speak, rather slowly and make reasonable breaks. It is OK to say 2-3 sentences in a row and then let the interpreter render them in the target language.

**In Class Interpreting Practical Application**

4$^{th}$ year Class Students

English Department, College of Languages

Salahaddin University

2$^{nd}$- Term 2021-2022

No. of students: 87

Group A: 28 students

Group B: 27 students

Group C: 32 students

Since the beginning of the course study in the academic year 2021-2022, Kurdish- English, written translation has been taught to the 4$^{th}$ year students as a subject in their curriculum program, two hours per week. Due to the importance of interpreting as an oral translation activity, it comes as a complementary to the written translation process. Moreover, the students need to practice it once they graduate or in applying for working as interpreters in the Kurdistan Region establishments and foundations.

Due to the students request and interest in having a short-term practical practice in class interpreting task, the required approval was obtained from the department, to devote, somehow, 6-8 hours practice for this purpose. In fact the actual practical sessions in the process with English-Kurdish rendering, then Kurdish- English interpreting which the latter seems somehow to be more complicated since it requires a high skill performance in language mastery and tactfulness on the part of the student.

During the formal in class interpreting setting, the teacher's role is to divide the class into small 4 to 5 students groups, giving each group a certain topic for discussion, and later on, each group to nominate a speaker and an interpreter on the behalf of the group, meanwhile, the other students in the groups are regarded as the audience and they watch and give their viewpoints regarding the performances of both the speaker and the interpreter, also the psychological stress imposed on them in practicing such a task of others and informal setting. The teacher's role is to guide them and give the required necessary comments later.

The performance of such a task is to be checked by the teacher for the evaluation purpose.

It seems that the students are more interested in practicing such an oral task more than the written translation activity. They see that they need to be well-acquainted with practicing such activity, practicing once they apply for jobs or work as interpreters after their graduation.

One can point out that the most problem areas of the students meant here, i.e., the speakers and interpreters, are the problem of English language mastery and not being able to arrive at the right equivalence in TL text for the SL text terminology or lexical items. Also, the non- linguistic factors impact and the psychological stress during performing such a task in a formal setting and in front of the audience and being in short of time, all these affect the students in class interpreting task.

In this practical practice of interpreting task in actual class setting with the 4th year students, most of them participated actively in performing the task as speakers, interpreters, and the audience giving their comments and viewpoints towards this challenging practice inside the class.

The Topics Given for Discussion and Performing the Task

1. Working in public or privet sectors after graduation.
2. Arriving to college on time is really a problem.
3. What are you looking forwards to achieve or to be once you graduate?
4. The advantages and disadvantages of using internet and social media nowadays.
5. An embarrassing situation once you come across.
6. Traffic and means of transportation problems.
7. In class interpreting and formal conference interpreting.
8. Written and oral translation.
9. The interference of mother tongue in English language performance.
10. What sort of register or text type you are interested in reading and investigating?

The following link represents the documented and recorded materials of students' performance zip archive (1) 9.9 (11 files).

**Conclusions**

The study has tackled the non- linguistic aspects of interpreting with reference to English and Kurdish, focusing on identification of meaning. It has highlighted the relevance of contextual appropriateness for lexical item choice. The hypothesis of input- output switches in the importance of speaker intention have also been examined; moreover, the study has illustrated practical applications of theoretical implications through examples taken from actual interpreting situations and class exercises:

- The study points out the way interpreters utilize a combination of linguistic and extralinguistic cues to ascertain meaning.

- In general, the study has attempted to show that there is much more involved in the practice of interpretation than the mere substitution of TL words for those of an SL.

- Interpretation gained a wide acceptance after its successful use at the Nuremberg Trials in the mid 1940s. during the late last century, much has been written about various aspects of interpretation.

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