

## Synopsis

To interpret first and foremost is to comprehend the source language. A close look at comprehension is apparently worthwhile. This thesis is an attempt to unveil the mystery of comprehension and put forth some tentative suggestions as to how to ensure and achieve effective comprehension in interpreting. It is divided into four chapters, excluding an introduction and a conclusion.

Chapter One probes into the vital role comprehension plays in interpreting. Comprehension, a key step towards successful interpreting, serves as a bridge linking the other two major steps: analysis and reconstruction. Without comprehension, analysis is meaningless and reconstruction cannot be successfully achieved. On the other hand, most interpreting failures or poor performances, if not all, are more or less caused by comprehension failures. Comprehension failures fall into misunderstanding, incomplete comprehension and comprehension blankness, all of which can be rather detrimental and should be avoided at any time.

Chapter Two is an attempt to unveil the mystery of comprehension. The general account of comprehension from a psycholinguistic perspective indicates that language comprehension is by no means a neat, straightforward process, but rather, a complex mental task. Garman's model further highlights the complexity of comprehension and suggests that linguistic symbols are not the only factors that should be taken into account when the process of comprehension is examined. Gile's Comprehension Equation indicates that comprehension, as a highly complex mental process, involves retrieving "stored information", both linguistic

knowledge and encyclopedic knowledge, from the long-term memory and relating it to the encountered discourse. On the other hand, comprehension in interpreting is a much more arduous task than in natural monolingual communication. Faced with this highly demanding task and equipped with only limited processing capacity, interpreters have to attempt the “feat” which can only be accomplished by those extraordinary rare breeds of qualified interpreters.

Chapter Three analyses the requirements to achieve effective comprehension in interpreting. The author first discusses the question as to what to comprehend in interpreting and then categorizes the requirements into fundamental requirements and on-the-spot requirements. To make successful reformulation in interpreting, interpreters ought to grasp the meaning packaged in a particular linguistic form, rather than the linguistic form per se. In addition, the communicational nature of interpreting indicates that what interpreters should try to comprehend is not the sentence meaning of an utterance but its speaker meaning. That is to say, interpreters ought to bring the dynamic on-going situation or context to the task of comprehension so as to take in the exact meaning intended by the speaker. To accomplish the task of comprehension successfully, interpreters should meet not only the fundamental requirements, that is, have sound linguistic knowledge and extralinguistic knowledge, but also the on-the-spot requirements, that is, to be a good effort coordinator, a good listener, a good analyzer, and a good synthesizer.

Chapter Four makes some tentative suggestions as to how an interpreter can achieve effective comprehension. To be a professional interpreter involves much hard work; he or she has to maintain an unending curiosity and boundless thirst for knowledge, and more importantly, work strenuously on accumulating linguistic

and extra-linguistic knowledge on a long-term basis. On the other hand, task-oriented preparations prove to be indispensable to effective comprehension in a particular assignment and should be interpreters' conscious strategy. The author finally introduces some comprehension-related skills, which might, if mastered, facilitate comprehension in interpreting.

In conclusion, to comprehend effectively all the time is an unreachable business, but for those who are or aim to be professional interpreters, they ought to work hard towards that direction.

**Key Words:** Effective Comprehension; Strategies

## 摘要

本文旨在探讨口译中理解的特点以及口译员如何在口译中达到有效的理解。本文分为四章：

第一章讨论了理解在口译中的重要作用。口译成功与否取决于理解的成功与否，理解连接着口译中另外两个重要步骤——分析和表达。理解是分析的目的，而没有成功的理解表达也无法达成。

第二章探讨了理解的特点。首先笔者从心理语言学的角度探讨理解的特点，指出理解非简单直接而是一种复杂的思维活动。笔者接着从 Garman 的语言理解模型进一步揭示理解的复杂性，指出听话人在理解的过程中不仅要理解语言信息而且要借助其它各种信息。Gile 的理解公式则强调了语言知识、语言外知识以及分析在理解中的作用。本章的最后笔者探讨了口译中的理解，指出理解难，口译中的理解更是难上加难。

第三章分析了口译中达到有效理解的要求。笔者首先探讨了“口译中译员应该理解什么”这一问题，指出在口译中译员应该透过语言形式抓住“讲话人意思”。笔者还指出在口译中要达到有效理解必须满足两方面的要求——基本要求（包括语言知识和语言外知识）以及现场要求（即译员应该擅长分配注意力，擅长听、分析及综合）。

第四章探讨了口译员如何达到有效理解。要成为职业口译员并非一日之功。口译员应该永葆强烈的好奇心和求知欲，并且长期不断地积累语言知识和语言外知识。另一方面，口译员在接到口译任务后应该针对该任务进行认真细致的准备。最后笔者介绍了一些理解的技巧。

总之，理解在口译中至关重要，探讨口译中理解的特点以及口译员如何在口译中达到有效的理解颇具现实意义。

**关键词：**有效理解；策略

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## Introduction

Comprehension is a key step towards successful interpreting. In the dynamic process of interpreting, as indicated in the XiaDa Model, comprehension is a bridge linking the other two steps leading to interpreting: analysis and reconstruction. Without comprehension, analysis is meaningless and reconstruction cannot be successfully achieved. On the other hand, poor performances in interpreting are usually caused by comprehension failures, which interpreters should therefore try to avoid.

The general account of comprehension from a psycholinguistic perspective indicates that language comprehension is by no means a neat, straightforward process, but rather, a complex mental task. Garman's model of language understanding further highlights the complexity of comprehension and suggests that linguistic symbols are not the only factors that should be taken into account when the process of comprehension is examined. In addition, Gile's Comprehension Equation indicates that comprehension, as a highly complex mental process, involves retrieving "stored information", both linguistic knowledge and encyclopedic knowledge, from the long-term memory and relating it to the encountered discourse. To make comprehension in interpreting possible, *analysis* is usually applied, which in turn demonstrates the demanding feature of comprehension in this special act of communication. Faced with this highly demanding task and equipped with limited processing capacity, interpreters have to attempt the "feat" which can only be accomplished by those extraordinary rare breeds.

Interpreting is essentially meaning-based. To comprehend effectively, interpreters ought to grasp the meaning packaged in a particular linguistic form, rather than the linguistic form itself. Moreover, the communicational nature of interpreting indicates that what interpreters should try to comprehend is not the sentence meaning of an utterance but its speaker meaning. That is to say, interpreters ought to bring the dynamic on-going situation or context to the task of comprehension so as to take in the exact meaning intended by the speaker.

To achieve effective comprehension in interpreting, a highly complex mental task, the interpreter ought to meet demanding requirements, which are tentatively categorized by the author into fundamental and on-the-spot requirements. Fundamental requirements for effective comprehension refer to the interpreter's good mastery of linguistic knowledge (LK) and extralinguistic knowledge (ELK), which are two integral components that comprehension cannot do without and should therefore be built up constantly and strenuously by the interpreter. Whereas on-the-spot requirements suggests that interpreters should be a good effort coordinator, a good listener, a good analyzer, and a good synthesizer.

An arduous task as comprehension in interpreting is, those who are or aim to be professional interpreters ought to work hard towards effective comprehension. They ought to maintain an unending curiosity and boundless thirst for knowledge, and more importantly, work strenuously on accumulating linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge on a long-term basis. They should also engage in task-oriented preparations whenever they accept a new assignment, since long-term knowledge build-up does not necessarily means the interpreter is readily competent for every interpreting task. Furthermore, interpreters ought to master

some comprehension-related skills, which, if mastered, will facilitate comprehension in interpreting.

In short, this thesis is an attempt to probe into the feature of comprehension and make some tentative suggestions as to how to ensure and achieve effective comprehension in interpreting.

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## Chapter One

### The Role of Comprehension in Interpreting

Interpreting, as an act of bilingual communication, cannot do without an interpreter acting as a mediator. The interpreter's complex mental processing activity, such as comprehension, cannot be duplicated into a machine to take the interpreter's place. Comprehension is apparently necessitated in interpreting.

The essentiality of comprehension in interpreting lies in the fact that comprehension is a key step towards successful interpreting. A detailed analysis of the dynamic process of interpreting as indicated in the XiaDa Model will shed light on the vital role comprehension plays in interpreting. It is a bridge linking the other two steps leading to interpreting, analysis and reconstruction. Without comprehension, analysis is meaningless and reconstruction cannot be successfully achieved.

On the other hand, most interpreting failures or poor performances, if not all, are more or less caused by comprehension failures. Comprehension failures fall into misunderstanding, incomplete comprehension and comprehension blankness, all of which can be rather detrimental and should be avoided at all times.

#### 1.1 Why Is Comprehension Necessitated in Interpreting

Interpreting is an act of bilingual communication. The interpreter is an indispensable link to make possible the communication between two parties who don't share the same language. To perform his or her task successfully, the interpreter has to receive the Source Language (SL) by the SL speaker, decode it, encode the same message and convey it to the Target Language (TL) receiver. This complex process can be simplified into two phases, comprehension and reformulation, as described in Daniel Gile's Sequential Model of Translation [1] (102). Comprehension, a complex mental processing task, goes beyond the simple recognition of words and linguistic structures [1] (75) and cannot be replaced by a machine translating device, at least not at present. Comprehension, as a complex mental activity peculiar to human beings, is undoubtedly necessitated in interpreting mainly for the following reasons:

First of all, languages are not modeled on exactly the same lexical pattern and there is no exact one-to-one correspondence between the words of any two languages. Open and read any page of an English-Chinese dictionary or a Chinese-English dictionary and we will notice that almost every vocabulary entry has several or even dozens of correspondent words or explanations in the other language.

Secondly, languages are not structured exactly on the same pattern. Any two languages obviously differ from each other in their syntactic structures and rules of grammar. The English sentence "Tom was waiting for Jack worriedly in the apartment at 9 o'clock last night" is completely different from the Chinese version, "昨晚9点汤姆在公寓里焦急地等着杰克", with almost all the syntactic elements rearranged.

Thirdly, subtle differences that relate to stylistics or pragmatics also exist in any two languages. The use of a particular type of word or structure may mean one thing in one language and something else in another, and may not be socially acceptable in yet another. For example, "How old are you?" in most cases is an acceptable question for the Chinese people but is offensive to most native English speakers.

Last but not least, comprehension is necessary when linguistic rules in the target language require the interpreter to express explicitly information that is not given in the source language. In some cases, the speaker delivers something implicit, which requires the interpreter to make inferences in view of the linguistic and situational contexts so as to convey the implied meaning. Making inferences is a human mental process and can by no means be realized by a machine translating device.

Because of all these differences in languages, word-for-word translation as a machine translating device does is awkward and doesn't make sense. As the AIIC Training Committee points out,

"To interpret a speech from its source language is to transfer its semantic, connotative and aesthetic content into another language, using the lexical, syntactic and stylistic resources of the second, or "target" language for that purpose. To interpret is first and foremost to understand the intended message perfectly. It can then be "detached" from the words used to convey it in the original and reconstituted, in all its subtlety, in words of the target language." [2]



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