

Pre-Interpreting Preparation under the Guidance of Schema Theory

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Abstract: Schema theory believes that related schemata in brain will be activated when they are highly matched to new information, which helps interpreters to swiftly understand the speaker, reduce the memory load and improve the delivery quality. Therefore, pre-interpreting preparation plays an important role for interpreters. Therefore, taking schema theory as its theoretical framework, this thesis demonstrates the importance of pre-interpreting preparation by analyzing the thorough preparation in terms of three schemata.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, there are plenty of international conferences held in China, which needs professional and specialized interpreters to link China and other countries. This means that interpreters must have specialized knowledge, accent of speakers, background of conferences, apart from excellent listening and speaking ability, and memory ability. Therefore, adequate pre-interpreting preparation goes a long way to excellent interpreting.

Schema Theory is applied to study pre-interpreting preparation, language output and listening ability, which explains there is a close connection between existed information in one's brain and new information. The former will be revived to help the interpreting once the latter is recognized by the interpreter.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. A Brief Introduction to Schema Theory

The concept of schema can be traced back to the 18th century when scholars believed that schema is a kind of knowledge rather than a technical term and that schema is an orderly complex information network in the human brain, which contains linguistic knowledge and encyclopedia knowledge.

In 1781, the term “schema” is first brought forward by Kant, German philosopher and psychologist, in his book *Critique of Pure Reason*^[1]. He points out that schema is a product of imagination, which means schema connects the concept and the object.

Bartlett, a British psychologist, first formally puts forward the theory in *Remembering: A Study*

in *Experimental and Social Psychology*^[2]. The schema theory is introduced to research on psychology. Bartlett believes schema is a new knowledge structure for past experience in the brain.

In 1980, Rumelhart, an expert in artificial intelligence, points out that schema is an orderly knowledge structure stored in people's mind^[3]. He reckons that an established schema will be activated later if the brain connects with other new schema.

2.2. Three Types of Schema

There are many classifications of schema made by scholars, but the classification made by Carrell is widely recognized. He classifies schema into three: linguistic schema, content schema, and formal schema^[4].

2.2.1. Linguistic Schema

Linguistic schema usually means basic knowledge about the language that originally stores in people's brain, such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, idiom, and discourse related to the task, which can help people to better learn foreign language. This schema lays the foundation for content schema and formal schema. For interpreters, basic language knowledge acts as the threshold and the basic requirement. Without language schema, content schema and formal schema are unlikely to be activated, then any interpreting skills and strategies are empty talk. On the contrary, if an interpreter possesses rich linguistic schema, it will be faster and easier for him or her to follow the pace and grasp the general idea of speakers.

2.2.2. Content Schema

Content schema refers to background knowledge of text content^[4]. It is usually related to the background information and cultural knowledge of a specific or given topic, such as the place of meeting, history and culture of countries, and characteristics, information, speaking style of the speaker. For interpreters, content schema can be regarded as encyclopedia knowledge for it involves a wide range of knowledge such as politics, economy, culture and society. Content schema helps interpreter to understand the speaker more efficiently and better, predict the following content of the speaker, lower the pressure themselves, and promote the accuracy and fluency of interpreting.

2.2.3. Formal Schema

Formal schema refers to "background knowledge of the formal, rhetorical, organizational structures of different types of texts"^[4]. It usually means how text is organized in general and its rhetorical structure, including different types of text, styles, sentence structures, language structures, etc. It can be seen that text structure has a great influence on memory in interpretation. If an interpreter possesses rich formal schema in the brain, he will predicate the logic or the sequence of the speech which can help the interpreter to focus on the content and understand the speaker. Therefore, experienced interpreters always prepare many formal schemata to cope with different types of speeches.

2.3. A Brief Introduction to Schema Theory

There are a lot of studies on the application of scheme theory to interpreting, which shows that the theory can fully be conducive for interpreters in the interpreting process.

Gile describes schema is the structure stored in people's mind and that nonverbal message is the main information of interpreting which interplays with linguistic information^[5]. The nonverbal

message refers to the knowledge related to the subject, namely background information, which is of great significance for understanding a language.

Rumelhart and Ortony emphasize the significance of background information understanding the language in interpreting^[6]. They believe that background information is the critical step in the process of interpreting and that when people absorb new information, they acquire key information through bottom-up model by activating their schema in brain and avoid ambiguity through top-down model by analyzing the information, which explains the process of listening and understanding.

Carrell and Eisterhold conduct many research that further display the importance of schema in listening comprehension^[4]. They hold that texts have no real meaning because they are only used to help listeners to construct the discourse meaning. If an interpreter can make full use of his or her background knowledge, it is easier to understanding the language.

Cook describes schema as the internal structure of human cognition and the existed knowledge stored in the brain, namely background knowledge^[7].

From the above-mentioned studies, it is concluded that schema theory goes a long way to interpreters in the process of interpreting and is able to guide the practical practice.

3. Pre-interpreting Preparations Based on Schema Theory

3.1. Pre-interpreting Preparation in Terms of Linguistic Schema

There are mainly two aspects of pre-interpreting preparation in terms of linguistic schema: vocabulary and pronunciation. The former includes making a glossary, getting familiar with the pronunciation of the terms and how to apply them to interpreting. These professional vocabularies are likely to contain numbers, and the name of places, organizations and persons.

3.2. Pre-interpreting Preparation in Terms of Content Schema

Preparations in terms of content schema can also be called preparations of background knowledge and information, which can be obtained by searching online, referring to some studies and literature, and building the framework in brain. Interpreters should also obtain detailed information.

3.3. Pre-interpreting Preparation in Terms of Formal Schema

Argumentative speech intends to express speaker's view and idea, which mainly includes introduction to the subject, speaker's opinion, corresponding evidences and conclusion. Narrative speech is aimed to show things and stories, which mainly includes five "W" and one "H": where, when, who, what, why and how. For this style, interpreters should attach great importance to specific words that includes time, place, character.

4. Pre-interpreting Preparations in Different Phases

In accordance with schema theory, people will compare the new information to similar information stored in their brain and reconstruct them by activating background knowledge when they meet novel things and experience. Interpreting process is mainly constituted by listening, memory, and expression.

4.1. The Role of Pre-interpreting Preparation in Listening Comprehension

As an initial step, listening comprehension serves as a bridge to connect the speaker and the audience. An interpreter has to understand the meaning of the speaker to make the task smooth. Therefore, the ability in listening comprehension is of great importance, which is greatly under the influence of linguistic schema. But this process requires that interpreters should understand not only the literal meaning, but also its hidden logic and structure to grasp the information and interpret smoothly and accurately. Content schema is conducive to this phase as well. Therefore, a full pre-interpreting preparation is helpful to deliver and understand.

4.1.1. Ambiguity Eliminator

Schema is beneficial to interpreters to eliminate equivocal words and make sure the real meaning of the speaker. Undoubtedly, there will be some strange words that the interpreters even never hear before and some words that have different meanings in different contexts, which is a huge obstacle in the process of interpreting. However, if interpreters make full and related preparation before interpreting in terms of the linguistic schema, content schema and formal schema, it will be easier to distinguish different meanings and select the right one because existed schema will be activated when new information come into the cognition of interpreters.

4.1.2. Anticipation

Schema can help interpreters to anticipate. Anticipation can be regarded as an important skill for interpreters because it has a direct influence on the delivery quality. Anticipation is a process of analyzing and inferring the following words, sentence, structures, even the general idea of speakers on the basis of background knowledge of interpreters, such as knowledge about the theme, topic, structure. Preparations before interpreting from the perspective three schemata enable interpreters to predicate potential content by activating related schema through “top-down” and “bottom-up” means. Reducing the pressure of interpreters can be achieved by effectively predicating the potential content of speakers.

4.2. The Role of Pre-interpreting Preparation in Memory

Interpreting is an information processing task featuring high intensity and complexity, which heavily depends on the interpreter’s memory ability. As the secondary phase of interpreting process, memory is closely connected to listening comprehension and language output. There are a lot of things that need interpreters to memorize in the process of interpreting, which poses a great challenge to interpreters. However, schema theory can simplify the notes of interpreters and thus reduce memory pressure in interpreting. Preparations in linguistic and content schema help to ease the pressure by simplifying notes and strengthening background knowledge.

4.2.1. Simplification of Notes

It is a common problem that at the very beginning of learning interpreting, many learners spare no efforts to write words as much as possible to make the sentence and information complete, which in fact is a huge problem that hinders better language delivery because it gives rise to an imbalance between taking notes and memorizing by brain. In addition, time-limited pre-interpreting preparations allow interpreters to simplify their notes and design a unique symbol so as to better form schemata in brain and to activate. Therefore, the notes are likely to be more simple, time-saving, and easier for interpreters to effectively recognize the useful information and

reconstruct the target language.

4.2.2. Pressure Reduction

Bartlett believes that memory is the combination of existed information in brain^[2]. In fact, memory is a process that interpreters compare, match the existed information with new information. Linguistic schema in brain plays a significant role in understanding and memorizing language. If new information shares similarities with existed schema, interpreters can keep up with the speaker, look for relevant information in memory, and thus understand and interpret the content. If interpreters embrace more schemata that are similar with new information, those schemata will probably be activated as soon as possible, and correspondingly, the memory pressure will be eased as well.

4.3. The Role of Pre-interpreting Preparation in Language Output

Language output manifests the ability of the interpreter. After taking a good command of source language in listening and memory, interpreters are able to free from the form of source language and properly deliver in target language. Interpreters are required to be equipped with not only skillful language ability and abundant knowledge, but also the ability to practice by making use of these knowledge. In this phase, if interpreters activate relevant schema as fast as they can, it will be time-saving and energy-saving and helpful to reduce the pressure, boost their confidence and effectively and precisely deliver the information.

4.3.1. Word selection

Linguistic schema and content schema exert positive influence on selecting the word in the process of language output because schema provides interpreters with a wide range of professional expressions and helps them to choose the optimal word. Therefore, within limited time, it is necessary for interpreters to effectively activate the schema in brain to guarantee the precision of word selection.

4.3.2. Ability to Deal with Potential Crises while Interpreting

It is undoubtedly that there will be some unexpected situations and crises in interpreting. Sometimes, there are situations that catch the interpreter off guard, such as the repetition, redundancy and ambiguity of speaker's expression and irrelevant information suddenly in the speech. But to deal with the crisis, interpreters should be equipped with on-the-spot reaction and abundant experience, which needs to accumulate schema for a long time. As a cognitive unit, schema enables interpreters to cope with different contexts and to improve his ability to handle unexpected situation and crisis. In conclusion, interpreters need to accumulate schemata as much as they can to cope with various unexpected situation and crisis that may happen.

5. Conclusion

It is clear that a full preparation before the interpreting task acts as a helper for better delivery and quality of interpreting. In the first phase of listening comprehension, it enables interpreters to remove the equivocal words and make them clear and to anticipate the potential words and idea that the speaker will probably say. In the second phase of memorizing, the pre-interpreting preparation can help the interpreter to simplify the notes, make a balance between hands and brain, reduce the memory load and boost the confidence. In the third phase of language output, it allows the

interpreter to choose the most appropriate word and improve the ability to handle the problem in an emergency. Therefore, interpreters must have a thorough pre-interpreting preparation from the perspective of the three schemata in order to ease the pressure and get familiar with the theme, thus promoting the interpreting quality.

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