

Foreword

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**Inference and Anticipation in Simultaneous Interpreting:
A probability-prediction model**

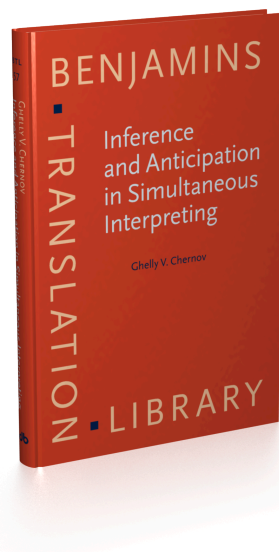
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Foreword

Since 1987, when my *Introduction to Simultaneous Interpreting* was published in Russian, a lot of water has flowed under the bridge as well as many an empirical study of simultaneous interpretation. Why then have I decided to publish in English now? One reason is that this work remains largely unknown to most readers, to whom Russian is as inaccessible as the proverbial Greek. But there were other considerations (for which I must also thank Robin Setton whose work in part inspired them).

The Nuremberg Trial in 1945–1946 marked the beginning of simultaneous interpretation, a new professional activity. The first research publication to inquire into SI appeared barely ten years later (Paneth 1957) and has been followed by numerous articles, books and dissertations, published mostly in Europe (including Russia). Today, forty years after the birth of the profession, and 30-odd years after research in simultaneous interpretation began, it is time to ask ourselves where we go from here. Should we scrap whatever has been done so far and start again from scratch in view of new scientific developments? Or should we take stock and evaluate what has been achieved and try to outline new directions of research in this rather unusual human activity?

By the nineteen-sixties, aided by the advent of the multichannel tape recorder, research was being published by several psychologists and professional interpreters, some of whom were also theoretical linguists (Henri C. Barik in Canada in 1971; David Gerver in the United Kingdom in 1974; Irina Zimnyaya & Ghelly Chernov in 1970; Anatoly Shiryaev in 1971, Ghelly Chernov in 1978; Danica Seleskovitch, Marianne Lederer, & the Paris-based *école du sens*). 1978 saw the publication of papers from the interdisciplinary seminar in Venice organised by D. Gerver (Gerver & Sinaiko 1978), which contained a wealth of ideas on SI.

From the late 1980s, the regular publication of *The Interpreters' Newsletter* by the Higher School of Modern Languages for Interpreters and Translators at the University of Trieste acted as a vehicle for a new wave of research projects, and further collections followed (Gran & Dodds 1989; Gran & Taylor 1990), most significant among them being neurophysiological studies. Among

important recent publications we find also the collective monograph *Bridging the Gap: Empirical Research in Simultaneous Interpretation* (Lambert & Moser-Mercer 1994), the three volumes of *Teaching Translation and Interpreting* (Dollerup et al. 1992, 1994, 1996), several papers by D. Gile and S. Viaggio, and work originating in countries like Finland (Universities of Kouvola, Joensuu, and others) or the Czech Republic (I. Čenková at Charles University in Prague) among others.

This literature has offered a wealth of ideas and suggestions, and in just a few cases, comprehensive models, notably an information processing model by Massaro-Gerver-Moser (Massaro 1978; Gerver 1977; Moser 1978), the so-called Theory of Sense expounded in detail by D. Seleskovitch and M. Lederer (Seleskovitch 1968, 1978; Lederer 1981), Laura Bertone's Speech Act Model (Bertone 1989), and Robin Setton's Cognitive-Pragmatic Model (Setton 1999).

Although it has been claimed that not enough facts about SI have been firmly established and that substantial additional banks of data and facts on SI are necessary, some facts were firmly established at the initial stage of research in SI and are now taken as axioms (or, to be more exact, a general agreement was reached on their validity): (a) that there is indeed simultaneity of SL message perception (listening) and TL speech production; (b) that interpreters deal with *sense* (discourse, text) and not words ('...interpreting [...] involves complex and difficult mental operations that require much more than mastery of linguistic skills in the relevant working languages' (Gile 1993: 136)); and (c) that SI activity falls within the framework of both interlingual and intercultural communication.

Recently there have been calls for the collection of more verifiable facts about SI and efforts to get beyond the deficiencies of the 'personal theorising' (PT) phase of research in SI. The suggestion is that 'Interpretation Research and Theory' (IRT) should replace the PT paradigm (Gile 1990: 28–41).

How is scientific research generally conducted? First, we must have an observable phenomenon (in our case – professional simultaneous interpretation). When we are about to begin our research we try to verify whether the observable part of the phenomenon (the tip of the iceberg) is really what we have initially taken it for: for example, is simultaneous interpretation really simultaneous? and if it is so, in what respect? (is it really an 'iceberg'?). Then we begin thinking about the nature of the phenomenon observed, its hidden mechanisms, and an idea (a hypotheticalal model) of such a mechanism is formed. Finally, we verify our hypothesis through observation and (if at all possible) experimentation. By assiduous observation one can establish quite a number of facts about the tip of the iceberg, while its greater part hidden in the depths

requires an additional effort involving hypothesis formation and verification. In fact, this is the way initial studies of SI have been done. D. Gile calls this type of research ‘personal theorising’; I would rather classify it as Fact-Finding and Conceptual Modelling.

Among interesting recent publications on SI are those produced by the Trieste School, although the reported investigations are somewhat uneven. Alongside some extremely interesting and revealing results (Fabbro & Gran 1994; Rizzine 1990) there are also some that fail to go beyond fact-finding; they seem to be trivial and even irrelevant because they do not take into account the specifics of communicative situations in SI.¹

Quite a number of recent publications concern interpreter training, which is not accidental. Among them are books by D. Seleskovitch and M. Lederer (1989) and D. Gile (1995), which both contain a wealth of ideas and suggestions in this field, and the three volumes on *Teaching Translation and Interpreting* (Dollerup et al. 1992, 1994, 1996). There is indeed an urgent need to research teaching methods on the basis of fundamental theory, and if the research now in progress can move in the direction of applied science it will make interpreter training much more intensive and efficient than it is now. There is no doubt that students should be aware of the fundamental facts and processes in conference interpretation, as most faculties and even many professionals apparently agree (Viaggio 1992, 1994; Visson 1999) since most professional schools now offer some kind of course in basic theory.

In her introduction to *Bridging the Gap*, Barbara Moser-Mercer suggests that there are two interpretation research communities – the ‘liberal arts group’ (*théorie du sens*, or interpretative theory) and the ‘natural science community’ (‘information processing theory’), the first of the two characterised by ‘its general consistency, [...] its comprehensiveness and simplicity, its intuitive explanatory force and consequent appeal to pedagogy [which] have all combined to give it widespread acceptance’. She then indicates that ‘there have been only a few attempts at verifying the theory, partly because it does not lend itself readily to verification’ (Lambert & Moser-Mercer 1994: 20). The other group is most comprehensively represented by the SI information processing model, which I would call the Massaro-Gerver-Moser model of the SI process. Moser-Mercer mentions several names among the protagonists of both groups and indicates that the aim of the volume is to bridge the gap between the two. Since she does not assign Chernov to either group, although there is a reference to some of my representative work and I am among the contributors to the collection, I have since been inclined to assume that my work was to be placed somewhere on the ‘bridge’ itself, halfway between the two extremes.

That is how I tend to regard my own model, the Message Probability Anticipation Model of basic psycholinguistic mechanisms in SI, the central hypotheses of which were published with supporting experimental results between 1970 and 1987 in several articles (mostly in Russian but some also in English) and two monographs in Russian, and which in today's terms may be classified as a semantic-pragmatic model.

I am inclined to take Robin Setton's monograph *Simultaneous Interpretation: A Cognitive-Pragmatic Analysis* (1999) as another 'bridge' between the two extremes. The author follows exactly the same methodology as I did, i.e. observation and hypothesising – experimental testing of the model hypothesised – analysis of the results obtained – conclusions and predictions for future investigations. Relying on current theories in psychology and linguistics, Setton has arrived at conclusions very similar to those yielded by my model, thus corroborating my conclusions. I also found that some of the ideas and reasoning rooted in the Russian school of psychology and neurophysiology (A. N. Leont'ev's Activity Theory in psychology and P. Anokhin's Theory of Anticipatory Reflection of the Outside World by the Living Organism and Functional Systems Theory) continue to offer rich potential for research in SI. In other words, I believe that my model still offers interesting possibilities and deserves to be known to the non-Russian speaking SI research community.

Probability anticipation as a general concept needs some explanation and deserves to be better understood by professionals. Visson, an author of SI manuals and a professional conference interpreter writes in her manual (Visson 1999:113), in discussing problems with interpreting proverbs, that it may be dangerous to use a good target-language (TL) equivalent of a proverb since speakers are prone to develop the metaphor contained in the proverb. She writes that 'all theories of [probability anticipation] notwithstanding, *a speaker's development of a metaphor cannot be accurately predicted* (my emphasis). The writer does not seem to be aware that that this in itself is probability anticipation, predicting the development of the metaphor with a probability of 0.5. So the theory needs some explanation.

Another important stimulus for the publication of the present English version of my book was the emergence of Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson 1986/1995) which I find to be highly relevant to my model, and which gives many new insights into the mechanisms of SI.

A word is in order about the materials I used as a corpus. Besides the experimental material described in Chapter 11 (see Appendix C), I also used about 40 hours of tape-recorded UN debates (recorded in 1968) with parallel transcripts of SI into four official UN languages (English, French, Spanish, and

Russian) (see Appendix B); the transcripts of the 1978 UN remote (satellite) interpretation experiment in Buenos Aires (see Chapter 5, §26 and Appendix A) and some observations of the performance of SI students at the UN Language Training Course at the Maurice Thorez Institute of Foreign Languages in Moscow between 1968 and 1975.

In the Foreword to the Russian edition of 1987 I expressed my deep gratitude to my colleagues among Russian linguists and psychologists who at various stages of my work took the time to discuss various linguistic and psychological aspects of my theory. I am particularly indebted to my co-author in the original hypothesis of message development probability prediction, Professor Irina Zimnyaya. My gratitude goes also to the late professors L. Barkhudarov, G. Kolshansky and O. Moskalskaya, and to Professor Shveitser, my colleague both in translatology and in the practice of SI, who at various stages of my work made valuable comments and suggestions. It goes without saying that I accept all the blame for whatever faults that there are in my work.

I am also indebted to my younger colleagues A. Gurevich, S. Lukanina, Y. Starostina, A. Usova and G. Filatova, who as undergraduate and postgraduate students at the time of the active research did all the arduous and time-consuming work needed for the initial time-coordinated temporal analysis of both the experimental corpus and the recorded UN material (Chernov et al. 1974).

Last but not least, my thanks go to my colleagues in the conference interpreting profession for their sympathy and support, and above all, to those among them, seasoned professionals, who participated in my rather strenuous experiments, and who for obvious reasons must remain anonymous.

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Moscow

