

## **Lexical Processing in Online Translation Tasks: the case of Polish-English-German professional and trainee conference interpreters**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the speed and accuracy of lexical processing of single words in the translation performance of professional conference interpreters (PRO), conference interpreting trainees (CIS), and a control group of non-interpreting trilingual speakers (TRI), all with the following language combination: Polish (A/L1), English (B/L2), German (C/L3).

The type (i.e. directionality) and amount of interpreting practice have been hypothesised to influence the cognitive make-up of PRO (and probably also CIS) to a greater extent than the close lexical affinity existing between the foreign languages in question. In the experiments, the participants decided whether pairs of words presented to them on the computer screen constituted the correct translation equivalents (from German into English, and from German into Polish), and translated single words presented visually on the computer screen into the microphone (from Polish into German).

Prolonged conference interpreting (CI) practice has been shown to influence strongly the organisation of lexicosemantic information in such a way as to support the accuracy but not necessarily the speed of lexical retrieval in translation tasks. The professional conference interpreters were nevertheless found to be highly capable of providing skilful and strategic processing of semantic/conceptual information, irrespective of the directionality employed. The results obtained seem to indicate that a two-year CI training period did not suffice for the mental reorganisation process to proceed to completion, as the overall translation performance of the conference interpreting students was shown to be worse than that of the control group. The influence of CI training may nevertheless be observed in the trainees' performance, particularly as regards the involvement of strategic processing in the translation production task (i.e. providing semantically-close translations in case of lexical retrieval problems rather than resorting to omissions). The influence of language distance and (psycho-)typology on the translation performance of the non-interpreting trilingual speakers was found to be largely negligible when performing online tasks. The control group was moreover observed to pay less attention to the questions of both accurate and strategic processing of semantic/conceptual information in translation than the interpreting groups.

The empirical research is preceded by a review of the most important empirical findings and models of the mental lexicon and of lexical processing in case of speakers of two and three languages. Two models of cognitive organisation in case of trilingual speakers have been developed, including those with and without CI experience.

The connectionist/dynamic view of the trilingual mental lexicon and processing supplemented by selected aspects of the modularity theory proves suitable to account for the nature of the findings obtained. Results of both experiments thus corroborate the assumption underlying the

two proposed models of the trilingual mental lexicon: namely that the different language subsystems of a trilingual speaker are separate but interconnected by virtue of associative links whose strength depends on factors related to individual linguistic experience (such as the type and amount of CI practice).

**KEYWORDS:** conference interpreting, lexical processing, online translation tasks, trilingualism.

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