SEX DIFFERENCES IN SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETING: A CORPUS-BASED STUDY

Introduction

Why sex differences?
Women have a better memory than men. They perform better in memory tasks (Maitland, 2004).

As memory is believed to be a key component of interpreting (Darby, 1994), is this difference observable in simultaneous interpreting?

Which variables?

Ear-Voice-Span
EVS is the time a concept is stored in memory and its length depends on the interpreter's memory capacity.

Disfluencies
Disfluencies, such as false starts and filled pauses, are generally regarded as a consequence of cognitive load.

Position of the verb
The midfield length in German and Dutch subordinate clauses can be considered as an indicator of memory capacity (Bevilacqua, 2009).

Research Questions

Given the sex differences in memory skills and assuming interpreters make full use of their cognitive capacities (Giles’ tight-rope hypothesis, 1995),

- Do women have a longer EVS?
- Do women produce fewer disfluencies?
- Do women render more figures?
- Do women place fewer items in the afterfield?

Methodology

European Parliament Interpreting Corpus Ghent (EPICG)
Time-aligned corpus
Aligned and annotated in EXMARALDA

180 Interpretations
90 women and 90 men.

European Parliament Interpreters
Naturalistic data and metadata.

6 Language combinations
From and into English, French and Dutch.

Variables

EVS
Pairs of tags linking up lexical equivalents in the source and target text.

Disfluencies
Number of filled pauses (uhmm) and false starts per minute.

Position of the verb
Length of the real midfield compared to the theoretical midfield.

Interpretation of figures
Number of correctly interpreted figures.

Metadata

Interpreters’ and original speakers’ disfluencies
Number of false starts and filled pauses.

Language combination
FR-EN, FR-NL, EN-FR, EN-NL, NL-EN, and NL-EN.

Speech duration
Duration of the original speech in minutes.

Interpreters’ and original speakers’ delivery rate
Number of words per minute.

Original speakers’ delivery type
Impromptu, mixed or read speeches.

Results

Ear-Voice-Span
The average EVS is 2.68 seconds
Two variables have a significant impact on EVS: language combination (p=0.00) and interpreter’s filled pauses (r=0.39, p=0.00).

Disfluencies
The average number of filled pauses is 4.91 per minutes and the average number of false starts is 0.
Five variables have a significant impact: EVS, language (p=0.00), original speaker’s delivery rate (p=0.00) and filled pauses (r=0.37, p=0.00).

Position of the verb
The midfield length in German and Dutch subordinate clauses can be considered as an indicator of memory capacity (Bevilacqua, 2009).

Interpretation of figures

Women
Men

Correct figures Incorrect or missing figures

Women: 47.9% 46.7%
Men: 82.1% 84.7%

Metadata that have no influence on EVS: delivery rate, delivery type, speech duration and original speaker’s disfluencies.

Metadata that have no influence on disfluencies: interpreter’s delivery rate, delivery type and speech duration.

Conclusions

Do women have a longer EVS?
No. Men have a longer EVS than women in general (U=2324579,500, p=0.00, r=0.04). However when relevant metadata are taken into account, it appears that this difference only exists in the EN booth, while other language combinations show no sex difference or a slightly longer EVS for women (EN-NL).

Do women produce fewer disfluencies?
Yes and no. When the influence of relevant metadata is taken into account, women do produce between 10 and 15 percent fewer filled pauses than men but there is no difference for false starts.

Do women render more figures?
No. There seems to be no significant difference between men and women.

Do women place fewer items in the afterfield?
No. There seems to be no significant sex difference.

The findings of the present study point towards the absence of sex differences in simultaneous interpreting, and the language combination seems to be the most relevant variable.

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References

Clarici, S. “At the Far End of the Tightrope Hypothesis in simultaneous interpreting.” Currents 23