

GAPS IN PERCEPTION OF ORAL DISCOURSE AND WAYS OF BRIDGING THEM IN INTERPRETING

Maksimov S. E.

Kyiv National Linguistic University

The article highlights the problem of defining the notion of gaps (lacunae) and causes of their occurrence in oral discourse. Special attention is drawn to the classification of gaps, which may occur due to subjective and objective factors practically at all levels of the linguistic system. The author suggests interpreters, who perform consecutive or simultaneous interpretation, some basic methods of identifying and filling in the gaps in order to provide equivalent interpreting.

Key words: oral discourse, gaps (lacunae), consecutive and simultaneous interpreting.

Максімов С. Є. Лакуни у сприйнятті усного дискурсу та способи «заповнення» лакун в усному перекладі. У статті досліджено проблему визначення поняття лакун та причини їх виникнення в усному дискурсі. Особливу увагу приділено класифікації типів лакун, що можуть виникати за рахунок суб'єктивних та об'єктивних факторів практично на всіх рівнях системи мови/мовлення. Автор пропонує усним перекладачам, які виконують послідовний або синхронний переклад, деякі основні методи ідентифікації та «заповнення» лакун для забезпечення еквівалентного перекладу.

Ключові слова: усний дискурс, лакуни, послідовний та синхронний переклад.

Defining the problem and argumentation of the topicality of its consideration. This article deals with the notion of gaps in perception of oral discourse and ways of bridging them in interpreting. **This problem is important** today because interpreting (both consecutive and simultaneous) plays a significant role in the contemporary world both at the national and international levels due to the rapid expansion of international relations of Ukraine. Inability of interpreters to fill in the gaps may result in serious mistakes in translation or in complete disruption of it.

Recent research and publications on the problem. In Ukrainian translation studies there seems to be quite a few publications on this problem, however it's worth mentioning at least two recent major publications on the subject, namely those by T. O. Anokhina [1] and O. O. Selivanova [6].

Thus, T. O. Anokhina believes that experts in translation studies debate whether technology of identifying, interpreting and filling in lacunae relates to domestication and foreignization strategies and whether practical transcription and transliteration techniques as well as commentaries and footnotes may be applicable to rendering lacunae. The author argues that in translation lacunae can be eliminated or filled in [1, 39].

O. O. Selivanova subdivides lacunae into systemic (phonological, lexical, nominative, morphological, syntactic and stylistic) and functional (communicative, culturally specific and cognitive). To eliminate complications in interaction O. O. Selivanova suggests compensation of lacunae by applying techniques of making commentaries, footnotes; substitution of the source language (SL) concept by the target language (TL) one, which is closer to the mentality of the TL speakers; by generalization (using hyperonyms); by applying translation transformations such as practical transcription, transliteration, loan translation options, etc. [6, 321].

However, it seems obvious that the technology of identification, interpretation and filling in lexical, semantic and other types of lacunae is still open.

The purpose and objectives of this article are viewed as defining the notion of gaps in perception of oral discourse and suggesting the basic ways of identification and filling them in by consecutive and simultaneous interpreters.

In this article gaps or lacunae (*lacunas*; *лакуни*; *пропуски*)¹ are viewed as blank spaces or missing parts in perception of oral and written discourse by the addressee which may occur both in monolingual and multilingual communication. Potential gaps in perception of fictional texts caused by psychological, national and behavioural specificity of a particular “culture” may be serious challenges (“cognitive constraints”) for translators of prose, drama and poetry [5]. However, this article focuses on gaps in the SL non-fictional oral discourse, i.e. on the fragments of discourse, which interpreters do not perceive for some reason and, therefore, are not able to render them into the TL. Interpreting practice shows that there may be two major groups of factors which result in failure to perceive² oral messages by the interpreter:

¹ In this article the term “gaps” is used to denote lacunae in oral discourse. Though this notion includes various linguistic (paronyms, translator’s “false friends”, barbarisms, etc.) and extralinguistic factors, we believe that the term “gap” suits best of all to describe this peculiar phenomenon of speech. In selecting the term “gaps” (lacunae) in discourse we were guided by the ideas of Yu. Sorokin, I. Markovina, T. Anokhina and O. Selivanova who describe exactly the same phenomenon and prefer to use this term.

² The word to perceive (but not to understand) is deliberately used here because for successful interpretation of certain elements of oral discourse it is often enough to perceive the “phonic substance” of the element (the term “phonic substance” was first used by Michael Hoey in his book “Patterns of Lexis in Text”). This is the case with numerals, proper names, some specific items of national lexicon and subject field terms (the so-called “precision lexicon” items), e.g. Kirkham – Керкем; Southampton – Саутгемптон; Peugeot – Пежо; phenacetin – фенацетин; diarrhoea, diarrhea – діарея, пронос; transfusion – трансфузія; perlocution – перлокуція; quadriga – квадрига; tequila – текіла, etc.

Subjective factors: lack of interpreter's cultural, linguistic or subject field competence;

Objective factors: various acoustic noises in the SL channel, "translator unfriendly" behaviour of the SL speaker who may have a heavy accent, speak indistinctly or too fast, use slang, jargon, highly specific items of national lexicon, incoherent syntax or simply have some speech defects.

There seems to be only one way to minimise gaps caused by subjective factors – constant development of interpreter's professional skills which requires improvement of both SL and TL cultural competence, in-depth insight into the subject field of interpretation, keeping personal records, glossaries, vocabularies, training memory, etc.

Gaps caused by the objective factors are often beyond interpreter's control, except for the cases when the interpreter, working in a consecutive mode, has an opportunity to ask the speaker to kindly repeat what has been said.

The author of this article does not pretend to give the in-depth and complete analysis of the problem in question; however, some recommendations on how to fill in the gaps are suggested below.

1. Types of gaps caused by the objective factors

Gaps caused by the objective factors may be of the following types:

1.1. Phonological gaps, i.e. gaps caused by the failure of the interpreter to differentiate between the SL sounds and intonation which have distinctive function [3, 550]. In their turn, phonological gaps may be caused by:

dialectal, regional or non-native accent³, for example:

East London (cockney) accent: [bə'laɪv] for *believe*; [kaɪf] for *case*; [k'aɪfɪz] for *cases*; [m'aɪbə] for *maybe*; [saɪ] for *say*; [tə'daɪ] for *today*; [laɪt] for *late*; [ə'waɪ] for *away*; [æplɪ'kaɪʃən] for *applications*; [əv'kɔːʃ] for *of course* etc.;

Brummy (Birmingham accent, Midlands, England): *Go [ʊp] the street till you see street-[lɔɪts] – Go up the street till you see street-lights (Йдіть узору по вулиці, доки не побачите світлофор)*;

Francophone accent (Quebec, Canada): *The GDP per capita may be compared to the number of eggs divided [per en] – /.../ to the number of eggs divided per hen (ВВП на душу населення можна порівняти з кількістю яєць, поділений на одну курку); I am very [æpɪ] to be [ɔː] with you today – I am very happy to be here with you today (Мені дуже приємно бути тут сьогодні з вами)*;

Indian English accent: [dɪs vaɪə ɪs kən'ektɪd tu ðɪ ɑːrθ] *This wire is connected to the earth (Цей дрiм заземлено)*;

Japanese accent: [vɪ vɪl naʊ dɪs'kʌs dɪ sɑɪdʒ əb dɪ ɡænd] – *We will now discuss the sales of the land (Зараз ми будемо обговорювати продаж земельних ділянок)*;

unintentional (or, maybe, intentional) mispronunciation or misuse of words (marked in the text by an asterisk "*"), for example:

*General [du'derev] (instead of General Dudaev); the city of ['su:tʃi:] (instead of Sochi); [ukrɑ'ɪmɔ] (instead of Ukraine); [tʃe'tʃenə] (instead of Chechnya); *race-horsing stadium (instead of horse-racing stadium); *letigimate (instead of legitimate), *ammunity (instead of immunity), *дискутивний (instead of дискусійний); *провокативний (instead of провокаційний), *ми приносим вам такую глубокую признательность instead of ...выражаем...; не треба тут ставити фіфти на фіфти (substandard idiomatic expression), etc.;*

individual speech defects caused by stuttering (stammering), false teeth, nervousness, etc., e.g. [meɪ aɪ sɪt hɪə] instead of "may I sit here?" – the British Lord was 88 and had false teeth; *екология (for Russian *экология*); *надкофка пфифу и берак (for Russian *подкормка птиц и белок*); *на тлапе берачка фифит (for Russian *на тропе белочка сидит*) – the lady spoke Russian "normally" in the corridor but became very nervous when she took the microphone; *cici-cici-cici-сиртифікату (for *сертифікату*) – the gentleman was suffering from a heavy stutter; *такати-так (for Russian *так сказать* or *так и так*) the gentleman had a speech defect, etc. In all of these instances interpreters should never laugh at people or show their indignation but take things as they are and showing great patience and respect of the speaker try to perceive/understand what the utterance is about and then reproduce it in the TL. This is not an easy task but it is so required by the AIIC (International Association of Conference Interpreters) Code of Ethics and accepted rules of human behaviour.

Phonological gaps are the most serious interpretation challenge, as the inability to perceive the "phonic substance" of the oral message makes further interpretation impossible.

1.2. Lexical gaps are caused by the use of slang, jargon (including professional jargon), dialectal words, rare professional abbreviations and acronyms, highly specific items of national lexicon or very specific idioms, e.g. *flat-top* (military slang) – *авіаносець*; *chopper* (military slang) – *вертоліт, гелікоптер*; *high-fliers* (administrative slang) – *перспективні, талановиті працівники*; *honky, honkie* (AmE slang derived from *honkies* – Hungarian community in New York City, USA) – *білошкіра людина*; *pot* (drug-users' slang) – *марихуана*; *shiv* or *chiv* (criminal slang) – *ніж, "непо"*; *APC* (*armoured personnel carrier*, military slang) – *БТР, бронетранспортер*; *TY* (*total yield*, military slang) – *загальна потужність ядерного заряду*; *вертушка* (military slang); – *вертоліт*; *сидушка* (drivers' slang) – *невеличке сидіння в авто*; *мочити* (criminal slang) – *вбивати*; *жиган* – *в'язень, позбавлений прав "на зоні"*; *прикид* (*teenagers' slang*) – *одежа, мода, стиль*, etc. [2; 9; 10].

Some newly coined by the Ukrainian media words at the beginning of this century are potential gap-makers. Certain professional political, diplomatic and administrative newly formed slang or jargon words also belong here. Examples of such words (most of them are nonce-words or "fly-by-night" units and are not registered

³All examples in this article are real-life and were taken either from personal interpreting experience of the author of the article at the Council of Europe, the NATO, the World Bank, the United Nations, OSCE, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, etc. or from the media. Phonetic transcription is given according to the rules of the International Phonetic Alphabet developed by the International Phonetic Association (IPA).

by dictionaries) are: *автівка* for *автомобіль*, *авто*; *кермувач* for *водій*; *далекогляд* for *бінокль*; *літовище*, *літалище* for *аеропорт*; *нарід (заст.)* for *народ*; *хрестослов* for *кросворд*; *лижварка* for *лижниця*; *генделік* for *пивничка*, *забігайлівка*; *итрикавка* for *шприц*; *міжповерховий дротохід* for *ліфт*; *пупорізка* for *акушерка*; *ветувати*, *заветувати* for *накладати вето*; *провокативний* for *провокаційний*; *заманіфестувати* for *проголосити*; *педалювати (питання)* for *прискорювати (розгляд питання)*, etc. Only the usage will over time tell whether such words will be accepted by the Ukrainian standard literary language or disappear. Usually newly coined words have a short life. They stop to be nonce-words after being used for more than 5-7 times in print and then they become registered by dictionaries.

Another potential group of “gap-makers” consist of words borrowed from other languages and used in the Ukrainian discourse as they sound (or are written) in these languages. The main source of such “borrowings” is, of course, the Russian language due to its close historical ties with Ukrainian, as well as because Ukraine is a multinational state, where Russian is widely spoken in the South and East of Ukraine, Kyiv included. In theory and in accordance with the АПС requirements to holding international conferences speakers should avoid using words from languages other than the announced official language/languages of the conference. It means that if the source speakers speak Ukrainian, they should not use Russian, English, German or, for instance, Polish words and expressions. The same holds true for speakers who speak Russian or any other language for which interpretation is provided at the conference. However, in practice this is not always the case. Quite often, especially at bilateral negotiations, round tables, press conferences, interviews and talk shows interpreters may hear from, for instance, Ukrainian speakers something like: “*Вы знаете, я сейчас скажу это на русском языке*”, which would require a very quick “switch” of the language code of the interpreter and may be regarded as interpretation in the environment of complicated communication, this time – multilingual. If the interpreter knows or at least has some understanding of such “third” language – then the interpretation is performed successfully. However, imagine that the interpreter doesn’t know the “third” intervening language. The result would be obvious – interpretation will fail and the message of the speaker will not be brought to the target audience. Here are some of the examples which the author of this article encountered in his interpretation practice: **так сказатъ* instead of *так би мовити*; **це питання стоїть на поевстке дня* instead of *на порядку денному*; **палата обцин* instead of *палата громад*; **на протязі року* instead of *протягом року*; **оружейный плутоній* instead of *збройний плутоній*; *знаєш що, мамо*, **Warszawa w porównaniu z Kijowom – to jak mala wioska* (from Polish) instead of *Варшава у порівнянні з Києвом – це як маленьке село*; *в Америці дуже багато* **шеровців* instead of *до втальні*; *the family were not recognised as* **la partie civile* (from French) instead of *the family were not recognised as a civil plaintiff* (or *as the aggrieved side*, or *as a damaged side* – *родина не*

була визнана громадським позивачем; потерпілою стороною; стороною, яка зазнала шкоди).

1.3. Grammatical gaps may be caused by:

morphological errors, such as misuse of tenses, mood forms, case forms, the use of double (even triple) negation etc. Such gaps seldom occur in official discourse and are usually filled in without great difficulty due to the natural grammatical redundancy of speech. For example:

There is now no you and me, no not more (Afro-American talk); *Yesterday I come*

home and I see that she is not there (West Midlands talk, Britain);

the use of syntactic structures with the reverse word order, which often occurs with the speakers of synthetic languages like Ukrainian and Russian. This may cause a serious problem first of all for simultaneous interpreters, who interpret into English, because they have either to wait for the subject group of the utterance to be pronounced by the speaker (this results in pauses in interpretation often filled in by the “pause filler” sounds – *err...*, – *erm...*, etc.) or render the utterance word for word (which may mislead the target language listeners), for example:

З інвестиційними компаніями роботу проводить розташована у Києві Комісія з цінних паперів та фондової біржі, списки підприємств, що приватизуються, складає Фонд державного майна.

2. Ways of filling in the gaps in interpreting

As it was mentioned above, gaps caused by the objective factors are beyond interpreter’s control. However, certain recommendations can be made on how to minimise the negative impact of such gaps upon the result of interpreting:

always write down numerals longer than 12; make use of interpreter’s note-taking techniques, such as special symbols and abbreviations;

always try to write down proper names of people and geographical names in whatever language you prefer (either the source or the target language);

if you hear something like *Як щойно сказала Галина Іванівна та підкреслив Юрій Федорович ...* and you don’t know the surnames of the persons mentioned, say in English something like *As the previous speaker (our colleague) has just mentioned ...* because patronymics usually mean nothing to the speakers of English;

always request lists of participants of the conference (seminar, meeting) and lists (glossaries) of basic subject field terms, abbreviations, acronyms, professional jargon, etc. from your employer. You may also get this information from the agenda of the conference and from background materials (dictionaries, booklets, reports, protocols, transparencies, Microsoft Power Point presentation slides, diagrams, charts, business cards or from the Internet);

try to talk to the presenters (speakers) before the conference starts and discuss peculiar words, abbreviations and notions with them;

keep your personal subject field glossaries – you may need them in some “critical” situations;

in extreme cases don’t hesitate to ask the speaker to repeat what has just been said – it’s better to apologise and clarify the matter than to mislead your audience by

wrong translation (however, this recommendation is good only for consecutive interpreting);

if the SL oral messages lack coherence and are syntactically disorganised, try to render the essence by giving the main idea in your translation (however, this recommendation is good only for consecutive interpreting);

if you perform simultaneous interpreting try to help your partner by writing down numerals, names and other precision lexicon words for him/her to see;

always be "tuned into" the context because, even if you miss, mishear or misunderstand something, it is the cohesion of the utterances that will help you. Lexical cohesion is provided by repetition links between words and bonds between sentences [4; 7]. It connects words within a sentence and sentences with each other and creates a "web" in oral and written discourse. Elements of this "web" are quite helpful if there is a need to fill in the gap, for example:

Israel and [?] initiated a peace treaty ending their 46 years state of war. King Hussein and Israeli Prime-Minister Rabin signed the treaty in Amman on Monday (1).

In this example it is quite easy to restore the missing name of the second state (which is *Jordan*) from the names of its former leader (*King Hussein*, who ruled Jordan from 1952 until 1999; the peace treaty was signed in 1994) and its capital (the city of *Amman*).

A strike by airport personnel in Norway grounded most domestic and [?] flights on Wednesday. More than 30 thousand passengers were affected by the [?] which is on-going (1).

In this example it is possible to restore the missing words from the context because the first word "international" is a logical antonym of the previous word "domestic" and the second one "stoppage" is a logical synonym of the word "strike".

Let's consider the following example: the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe: *I am looking around the room to see if Mr Kostitsky from Ukraine is present. Apparently, he is not present either [?] fortunately Mr Telek from Turkey is present. You have the floor! (2).*

In this example the speaker quickly pronounces the words "and fortunately", which can be easily misheard as "unfortunately" (*на жаль). However any interpreter should know that the President of the Parliamentary Assembly cannot express regret on the occasion of the presence of the deputy at the session and should correctly understand this phrase as "and fortunately" – на щастя.

Constantly improve your professional skills and cultural competence. In fact, constant learning is a lifetime process for all professional interpreters – it never stops throughout your interpretation career. Professional interpreters must know surnames and names of major political leaders of the international community, be well-informed of recent political and economic developments, always be "tuned" to set phrases and other "words of the day" which are often referred to as "pat phrases" [8, 127–128] and it goes without saying that they have to know as many subject field words as possible.

Therefore, the following **conclusions** can be made as a result of the analysis performed in the article: 1) potential gaps (lacunae) may occur in oral discourse practically at any level of linguistic structure; 2) gaps may be caused by the subjective and objective factors; 3) interpreters can fill in the gaps due to the natural redundancy of discourse and by using recommendations outlined in the closing section of the article; 4) the author of this article supports T. O. Anokhina [1] and O. O. Selivanova [6] who suggest basic translation techniques (transformations) with the aim of elimination lexical and semantic gaps outlined in the opening section of this article. These basic methods are: techniques of making commentaries, footnotes; substitution of the SL concept by the TL one, which is closer to the mentality of the TL speakers; using generalization (hyperonyms); applying translation transformations such as practical transcription, transliteration, loan translation options, etc.

Further research into the problem of gaps may deal with the in-depth analysis of other types of gaps in oral discourse and working out additional ways of how to fill them in by consecutive and simultaneous interpreters.

REFERENCES

1. Анохіна Т. О. Декодування лексичних та семантичних лакун на міжмовних векторах лінгвістики / Т. О. Анохіна // Філологічні трактати. – 2015. – Т. 7. – № 2. – С 38–43.
2. Квеселевич Д. И. Русско-английский словарь ненормативной лексики / Д. И. Квеселевич. – М. : ООО «Изд-во Астрель»: ООО «Изд-во АСТ», 2002. – 1120 с.
3. Лингвистический энциклопедический словарь / [ред.: В. Н. Ярцева]. – М. : Сов. энциклопедия, 1990. – 686 с.
4. Максимов С. Є. Практичний курс перекладу (англійська та українська мови). Теорія та практика перекладацького аналізу тексту / С. Є. Максимов. – К. : Вид. центр КНЛУ, 2016. – 176 с.
5. Марковина И. Ю. Лингвистический и культурологический перевод драматургического текста / И. Ю. Марковина // Материалы VIII Всесоюзного симпозиума по психолингвистике и теории коммуникации : [тезисы докл.]. – М. : Ин-т языкознания АН СССР, 1985. – С. 112–114.
6. Селіванова О. О. Лінгвістична енциклопедія / О. О. Селіванова. – Полтава : Довкілля-К, 2011. – 844 с.
7. Hoey M. Patterns of Lexis in Text / Michael Hoey. – Oxford : Oxford Univ. Press, 1991. – 276 p.
8. Jones R. Conference Interpreting Explained. Manchester / Roderick Jones. – St. Jerome Publishing, 1998. – 152 p.
9. Longman Exams Dictionary / Editors Adrian-Vallance, Karen Cleveland-Marwick, Chris Fox, Elizabeth Manning, Michael Murphy, M. Stark. – Edinburgh Gate, Harlow : Pearson Education Limited, 2006. – 1831 p.
10. Thorne T. Dictionary of Modern Slang / Tony Thorne. – М. : Вече, Персей, 1996. – 584 с.

SOURCES OF ILLUSTRATIVE MATERIAL

1. EuroNews. URL: <http://www.euronews.net>.
2. Speech of Mr Telek at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. URL: <http://www.coe.int>.