



Managing Information Loss: The Role of Lexical Simplification and the Omission Strategy in Consecutive Interpretation

M. A. Dawood¹ M. S. Hasan²

Department of Translation, College of Arts, University of Mosul

Article information

Article history:
Received: 20 April 2025
Revised: 21 May 2025
Accepted: 1 June 2025

Keywords:

Consecutive Interpreting
Lexical Simplification
Omission Strategy
Information Loss
Information Density
Interpreter Training
Translation Universals

Correspondence:

M. A. Dawood
muhamedalhayo70@gamil.com

Abstract

Simplification is one of the translation universals alongside explicitation and generalization. It refers to the idea that interpreted or translated messages are often rendered with reduced complexity compared to the source text. Accurate and complete information transmission to the target audience is crucial for successful communication; any loss or distortion in this process might limit the audience's ability to comprehend and interpret the intended message. Therefore, this study analyzes the effectiveness of simplification strategies and investigates how they influence the informativeness and communicative function of interpreted texts. The study adopts an integrated model combining the lexical simplification strategies suggested by Blum-Kulka and Levenston (1983), the syntactic simplification strategies developed by Mountford (1976), the emergency strategies suggested by Kalina (1998), and the information density formula developed by Laviosa (2002). It analyses extracts of news reports consecutively interpreted by the third-year translation students at the University of Mosul in a classroom setting. The study hypothesizes that during the consecutive mode of interpreting, translation students employ simplification strategies at different rates, which may result in information gaps and an incomplete flow of information. Furthermore, less-used strategies could better maintain the informativeness of the source text, whereas the most popular ones aren't always the best. Finally, the study concludes that sometimes, due to a lack of experience or understanding, translation students tend to favor particular simplification strategies over others and frequently rely largely on omission. But often, omission results in the loss of essential information, which distorts rather than clarifies the original message. Conversely, less popular strategies like approximation, paraphrasing, and superordinate terms have higher success rates, indicating that they might be more useful for managing complex source texts and enhancing comprehension.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69513/jnhf.v4.i1.a7> ©Authors, 2026, College of Education, Alnoor University.
This is an open access article under the CC BY 4.0 license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

إدارة فقدان المعلومات: دور التبسيط المعجمي واستراتيجية الحذف في الترجمة المتعاقبية

أ.م. د ماهر سامي حسن محمد عبد الرزاق داود

جامعة الموصل – كلية الآداب – قسم الترجمة

يُعتبر التبسيط أحد المفاهيم العامة في الترجمة، بجانب الإيضاح والتعميم. ويدل على فكرة أن الرسائل المترجمة غالباً ما تُقدّم بتعقيد أقل مقارنةً بالنص الأصلي. يُعدّ نقل المعلومات بدقة واكتمال إلى الجمهور المستهدف مسألة بالغة الأهمية لنجاح التواصل؛ فأى ضياع أو تحريف في هذه العملية قد يحدّ من قدرة الجمهور على فهم الرسالة المقصودة وتفسيرها. لهذا، تُحلّل هذه الدراسة فعالية استراتيجيات التبسيط، وتتنظر في كيفية تأثيرها على المعلوماتية والوظيفة التواصلية للنصوص المترجمة. تعتمد الدراسة نموذجاً مُتكاملاً يجمع بين استراتيجيات التبسيط المعجمي التي اقترحها بلوم-كولكا وليفينستون (1983)، واستراتيجيات التبسيط النحوي التي طوّرها ماونتفورد (1976)، واستراتيجيات الطوارئ التي اقترحتها كالينا (1998)، ومعادلة حساب كثافة المعلومات التي وضعها لافيوزا (2002). وتُحلّل الدراسة مقطّعات من تقارير إخبارية قام طلاب الترجمة في السنة الثالثة بجامعة الموصل بترجمتها تعاقبياً في بيئة صفيّة. تفترض الدراسة أنه خلال أسلوب الترجمة التعاقبية، يستخدم طلاب الترجمة استراتيجيات التبسيط بمعدلات متفاوتة، مما قد يؤدي إلى فجوات في عملية إيصال المعلومات. إضافة إلى ذلك، يمكن للاستراتيجيات الأقل استعمالاً المحافظة على معلوماتية النص المصدر بصورة أفضل، في حين أن الاستراتيجيات الأكثر شيوعاً ليست دائماً الأفضل. وأخيراً، خلصت الدراسة إلى أنه في بعض الأحيان، بسبب قلة الخبرة أو الفهم، يميل طلاب الترجمة إلى تفضيل استراتيجيات تبسيط معينة على غيرها، وكثيراً ما يعتمدون بشكل كبير على الحذف. لكن في أحيان كثيرة، يؤدي الحذف إلى ضياع معلومات أساسية، مما يُشوّه الرسالة الأصلية عوضاً عن توضيحها. على النقيض من ذلك، تتمتع الاستراتيجيات الأقل شيوعاً مثل التقريب وإعادة الصياغة واستخدام المصطلحات الفوقية بمعدلات نجاح أعلى، ما يُشير إلى أنها قد تكون أكثر نفعاً لإدارة النصوص المصدرية المعقدة وتعزيز الفهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الترجمة التعاقبية؛ التبسيط المعجمي؛ استراتيجية الحذف؛ فقدان المعلومات؛ كثافة المعلومات؛ فقدان المعلومات؛ تدريب المترجمين

Introduction

Consecutive interpreting (CI) is a high-demand cognitive activity in which an interpreter listens to a chunk of speech in a source language (SL), notes key points, and then translates the information to a target language (TL) when the speaker has stopped speaking. This type of interpreting is often used in places like courtrooms, clinics, boardrooms, and international negotiations. Compared to simultaneous interpreting, where the interpreting is done in the same time frame as the speaker, CI gives the interpreter time to process and reformulate. This period, however, also has its difficulties, not least in terms of the effective and comprehensive passing on of information. It is bound to be a highly risky process in which information loss is a big threat due to the nature of the process itself regarding cognitive load, constraints of memory, and linguistic differences between SL and TL.

Information loss in CI is defined as any difference in informational content between the SL message and the TL rendition, from minor details to critical elements of the meaning or impact of the original utterance. The loss may result from the interpreter (e.g., overheating of memory, processing difficulties, poor note-taking skills, a lack of fluency in one of the languages involved (i.e., SL or TL), or the intentional deployment of coping strategies under time pressure). So, the most important part is, how can we avoid the loss of information, the quality, and fidelity of the results obtained during the interpretation?

The strategies interpreters use to manage some of the demanding nature of CI include lexical

simplification (LS) and omission (O), which seem to be the most common at the same time most influential. Lexical simplification is the process of substituting complex or single-meaning SL words with simple, general, or closely equivalent TL words. This approach can improve fluency and coherence, making the interpretation more energetic for the target audience, particularly when facing heavy or technical source content. On the contrary, omission occurs when some elements of the SL message are not conveyed in the TL message. Such omissions might happen because of time pressure, information overload, the belief that something is “not important,” or the interpreter’s failure to encode or remember to render some particular details. In translation and interpreting, LS and O are widely recognized as universals, as they are used subconsciously or purposefully to overcome problems of processing (Blum-Kulka & Levenston, 1983; Gile, 2009).

But implementing these strategies comes with a delicate balancing act. Although LS is helpful to understand certain ideas and allows more fluent delivery, excessive or improper usage may create ambiguity, a lack of nuance, or even misrepresentation of the original message. Likewise, although leaving out redundant or peripheral information may be permissible or even obligatory in certain contexts (Kalina, 1998), suppression of essential elements of the message can lead to degradation of its informative content and affect interpretation accuracy. Examination of the use of these strategies by interpreters, in particular trainees,

and the effect on information transfer is essential for creating appropriate training approaches.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the roles of lexical simplification and the omission strategy as means of information loss control in consecutive interpreting conducted by student interpreters. This study examines the occurrence and type of these two strategies through analyzing interpretations of English language news reports.

Theoretical Background and Previous Research

The use of lexical simplification and omission as strategies for managing information load in consecutive interpreting draws on related theoretical perspectives, but to truly understand the nature of these strategies and how they operate, it is important to look at the dynamics of information management in the context of consecutive interpreting. Although these strategies are typical not only for interpreting but are known as an accepted phenomenon in language use and translation as well, being a common subject within the paradigm of communication strategies and translation universals.

Existing research examines the use and impact of these strategies. Specifically, studies investigating this aspect comparing professional and student interpreters have shown that, although both groups make use of simplification and omission, professionals in general do so more optimally, maintaining the essence of the meaning to a greater extent (Gile, 2009). Research focused on particular typologies has also demonstrated the influence of linguistic distance and text complexity on both the frequency and nature of strategy use. Other study shows that simplification may be a more ubiquitous characteristic of translational and interpretational activity, while the degree and the character of omission may be instead more connected to proficiency and particular task constraints (Laviosa, 2002). Grasping these behaviors, and especially how student interpreters handle lexical simplification and omission, provides an opportunity for targeted training interventions to address information management, which helps achieve an effective target rendition.

Lexical Simplification

Lexical simplification refers to the practice of substituting source language lexical items for target language equivalents that are easier, more general, or more common. In their pioneering work on universals of lexical simplification in interlanguage

discourse (Blum-Kulka and Levenston 1983), Blum-Kulka and Levenston found several ways this appears. These are the employment of a superordinate (e.g., saying "flower" to refer to a rose), approximation (the use of a word with a meaning that borders the meaning of the target lexeme, such as "chair" for "stool"), circumlocution or paraphrase (describing a concept rather than using a specific term), and conversational fillers or hesitation markers. In the case of interpreting, simplification is often used to offload cognitive burden, improve fluency, or compensate for lexical gaps between the source and target languages concerning complicated, technical, or culture-bound terms (see, for example, Beaton et al.)

Lexical simplification is most likely to be carried out to preserve the flow of communication and ensure that the audience understands. More general or common terms might make the message easier to understand, though (and ultimately process) for the target audience, something interpreters can work towards. But there are some cons with such a tactic. Simplicity, by its nature, implies less specificity. Using a broader term instead of an exact term can cause loss of nuance or may even misstate the term entirely if the simplification is too broad or imprecise. As a result, the success of lexical simplification relies on the interpreters' judicious selection of simplified terms that retain the informational value and the speaker's intention (Blum-Kulka & Levenston, 1983).

The Omission Strategy

Omission, which is the conscious or unconscious presence of source language elements that have been removed from the target language version, is another common interpreting strategy. Omission has been described as a coping strategy that is usually activated in situations of cognitive overload, time pressure, and difficulty in understanding/reformulating the source messages, in particular, some elements (Kalina, 1998; Gile, 2009). When interpreters have the sense that the meaning is redundant, or the phrase is too difficult to translate quickly, or if they cannot keep up with the speaker, they may omit words, phrases, or even entire clauses.

According to Gile's (2009) Effort Models of interpreting, this highlights the cognitive effort involved -- if the processing capacity is exceeded, omission becomes a near-inevitable response. This will involve omitting anything that is a repetition, a false start, or a peripheral narrative that does not

affect the overall message. The real danger with omission, however, is the potential omission of key information. Omitting elements crucial to the meaning, coherence, or pragmatic force of the original utterance has the potential to drastically undermine the fidelity of the interpretation. Recognizing which omissions are appropriate or strategically beneficial and which are harmful is evident to be a difficult task, especially for trainees (Kalina, 1998).

Information Density

Information density is defined as the amount of information conveyed per unit of language (e.g., per word or syllable). The information density of source texts is a topic with significant variance between text genres; technical reports or academic lectures, for example, are generally denser than casual conversations. Source speech with high information density often puts an interpreter under increased cognitive load to produce the target speech, which may also require using strategies such as simplification or omission. Omission not only decreases the density through the use of less specific terms (i.e., simplification), but also through the transfer of fewer bits of data from the source text to the target. The relation of lexical density — a measurable feature indeed — is explored by Laviosa (2002), who notes that seamless texts and target texts tend to show a lower density than original texts, related to simplification strategies.

Methodology

The current study took a mixed-methods approach to understanding the use of lexical simplification and omission strategies during consecutive interpreting by student interpreters and to evaluate how these strategies might affect information transfer.

Procedure and Data Collection

The data are collected at the Translation Department, College of Arts, University of Mosul, during the academic year 2023-2024. The study participants are third-year students who, according to the study coursework, engage in real consecutive interpreting tasks during the first and second semesters. Ten students are selected, and the participants' interpretations of twenty VOA (Voice of America - <https://www.voanews.com/>) news report extracts are recorded and transcribed. Each participant is assigned two extracts of relatively the same length for consecutive interpretation under language lab and classroom conditions.

Data Analysis

This case study examines the translation performance of two subjects across two different extracts, focusing on their use of lexical simplification strategies and the effects on information density and message accuracy.

Subject. 1

ST:

Elon Musk, the founder of the electric car company Tesla, recently asked people on Twitter if he should sell billions of dollars in company stock. Musk is one of the world's richest people, so the request was unusual. He asked his millions of Twitter followers whether he should sell 10 per cent of his stock in the company.

TT:

إيلون ماسك منشئ شركة السيارات الكهربائية تسلا نشر تغريدة في التويتر سأل الناس فيها إذا ما كان يريد بيع ملايين من الدولارات من أسهم الشركة. ماسك هو أحد أغنياء العالم سؤال ماسك كان غير عاديا. سأل الملايين من متابعيه إذا ما كان يريد بيع 10٪ من أسهم الشركة

SR:

سأل إيلون ماسك، مؤسس شركة تيسلا للسيارات الكهربائية الناس في تغريده له على تطبيق تويتر مؤخرا عما إذا كان يتوجب عليه بيع أسهم من الشركة بقيمة مليارات الدولارات. ويعتبر ماسك أحد اغنياء العالم وبالتالي كان هذا السؤال غريبا الى حد ما حيث سأل الملايين من متابعيه على تويتر ما إذا كان يتوجب عليه بيع 10% من أسهمه في الشركة

Analysis:

Part 1: ST, TT, and SR Information Density

The ST information density is: $(31 / 57) * 100 = 54\%$

The TT information density is: $(36 / 48) * 100 = 75\%$

The SR information density is: $(38 / 60) * 100 = 73\%$

Part 2: Analysis of Simplification Strategies

Lexically speaking, the subject uses the following lexical simplification strategy in rendering the ST, namely, the use of approximation, using synonyms, transfer, and omission. The subject renders the ST lexical item (request) into a more general alternative (سؤال - asking), which is primarily considered a more straightforward and more commonly understood equivalent of the ST lexical item that describes the field of the interrogation and includes several alternatives, such as pleading, petitioning, inquiry, question, asking, etc. Additionally, the subject uses the strategy of using synonyms as he renders the gradable ST adjective (richest-الاغني)، which is a superlative adjective, into the base adjective (غني- rich). The subject, however, fails to convey the gradability of the ST lexical item. Moreover, the subject

incorrectly transfers the ST lexical item (billions – مليارات) into (millions - ملايين), which is different in number or quantity of the ST. Another strategy is the omission strategy, as the subject omits some essential words from the ST (recently- مؤخرًا, Twitter- تويتر). The subject successfully conveys 29 of the total 31 meaning carrier words in the ST. This means that 93% of the information load of the ST is successfully transferred.

Part 3: Analysis of Information Density

The subject uses the previously mentioned lexical simplification strategies to reduce the lexical and structural differences in the ST by presenting multiple alternatives in the TT. The incorrect application of the simplification strategies highly affects the interpreted message's accuracy and informativity. The varying degrees of informativeness between the ST and TT can be attributed to different reasons. The tendency of Arabic to be verbose results in a longer TT, increasing its information density. The difference in the ratio of total words to content words. The TT has fewer total words, but the number of content words is more aligned with the total words, thereby enhancing the density.

Subject. 2

ST:

The smog that covers the city is a mix of pollutants, including Car emissions, industrial pollution, dust from building projects, farm fires, and pollution caused by trash burning. In winter, the pollutants hang over the city because of low wind speeds. City officials in New Delhi told the Supreme Court that they are considering a weekend lockdown, similar to what happened during severe periods of the COVID-19 pandemic.

TT:

الضباب الذي يغطي المدينة ناتج عن الملوثات التي هي انبعاثات عوادم السيارات. في الشتاء الدخان او هذه الملوثات تقع فوق المدينة بسبب قلة الهواء او قلة حركة الهواء. مسؤولو المدينة أخبروا المحكمة العليا بأنهم يفكرون في إجراء حظر تجول في نهاية الأسبوع يشابه ما حدث في جائحة كورونا

SR:

الضباب الدخاني الذي يغطي المدينة هو مزيج من الملوثات بما في ذلك انبعاثات السيارات والتلوث الصناعي والغبار الناجم عن مشاريع البناء وحرائق الحقول والتلوث الناتج عن حرق النفايات. وتخميم الملوثات في فصل الشتاء على المدينة بسبب انخفاض سرعة الرياح. أخبر المسؤولين في نيودلهي المحكمة العليا أنهم يفكرون في فرض حظر تجول في عطلة نهاية الأسبوع على غرار ما حدث خلال الفترة التي اشتدت فيها جائحة كورونا

Analysis:

Part 1: ST, TT, and SR Information Density

The ST information density is: $(42 / 66) * 100 = 63\%$

The TT information density is: $(32 / 49) * 100 = 70\%$

The SR information density is: $(50 / 67) * 100 = 75\%$

Part 2: Analysis of Simplification Strategies

The subject lexically simplifies the ST as he consecutively interprets the ST. The subject interprets the ST lexical hyponym item (the smog- الضباب الدخاني) into the superordinate item (الضباب - the fog), which has a more general reference and is considered a comprehensive superordinate title that describes the air. Additionally, the subject uses the strategy of using synonyms twice. Blum-Kulka and Levenston (1983) define this strategy as using more uncomplicated or more commonly understood synonyms for a word.

Firstly, the subject renders the ST's item (low- انخفاض) into (قلة - little) in the TT. The subject substitutes the more frequent ST word with an unfamiliar and infrequent TL word. Secondly, as he/she renders the ST lexical item (lockdown- اغلاق), the formal equivalence of which is comparatively infrequent in the TT, into the more frequent target word with a more familiar synonymy (حظر تجول - curfew) in the TT. The last lexical simplification strategy is represented by the subject's use of the phrase (as a result of - ناتج عن) as a paraphrasing of the ST clause (is a mix of - مزيج من).

According to Blum-Kulka and Levenston (1983), paraphrasing explains a complex term by describing its function or meaning. The subject also uses the omission strategy to simplify the ST. He successfully conveys the translation equivalents of only 25 content words, approximately 59 % of the total (42) content words in the SLT. In contrast, he fails to convey the translational equivalents of 17 content words, which is 40%. The subject underrepresents essential meaning carrier words such as the phrases (industrial pollutions - التلوث الصناعي), (farm fires - حرائق الحقول), and (severe periods - فترات شديدة), as well as omitting the phrases (dust from building projects - الغبار الناجم عن مشاريع البناء) and (pollution caused by trash burning - التلوث الناتج عن حرق النفايات). Moreover, the subject omits substantial content words such as (Including - يتضمن), (speeds - سرعة), (New Delhi - نيودلهي), and (During - خلال).

Part 3: Analysis of Information Density

The subject employs lexical simplification strategies, namely super-ordination, synonyms, paraphrasing, and omission, to simplify the linguistic variations in the ST using several TT possibilities. The difference in informativity between the ST and the TT is due to some attempts the subject employs consecutively, rendering the ST. The verbose nature of Arabic and the tendency to add and repeat consequently increase the number of TT words, increasing the density of information in the TT. This increased density does not always indicate that the TT adequately conveys all of the information from the ST.

Overall Observations

Both subjects demonstrated a tendency toward simplification strategies that increased the TT's information density. However, these strategies often compromised the accuracy, completeness, and faithfulness of the original message. The findings highlight a critical trade-off between simplification for readability and the necessity of preserving essential details in translation and interpreting practices.

Conclusion

This study focuses on lexical simplification and omission strategies employed by third-year student interpreters when performing English-native-language consecutive interpreting tasks. The analysis showed that although both strategies were used, omission was more prevalent among students, typically leading to too much information being lost. Lexical simplification, when employed, appeared beneficial for communication flow and clarity, but its usage was sporadic, marked by over-generalizations that resulted in a somewhat compromised level of precision.

This reinforces the difficulties that student interpreters encounter when doing information management under cognitive pressure. The pattern of problematic omissions implies that identifying or prioritizing information at the core of the problem is a challenge or that processing capacity limitations are preventing successful reformulation. Although lexical simplification can be useful, the ability to utilize it selectively to meet the needs of a clear yet accurate message is a sign of more advanced grammar knowledge, and one that appeared to be underdeveloped in the group of participants. This set of results speaks to the need for more targeted pedagogical interventions in interpreter training.

This information loss mitigation should be explicitly mentioned in curricula, but not just in the note-taking sense, but also in the aspects of analytical listening, information priority, and the judicious use of reformulating strategies (e.g., lexical simplicity). Awareness of the possible effects of both desirable and undesirable simplification and omission is essential to creating interpreters who offer an accurate and informative rendition.

We need more information to paint a more nuanced picture of strategy use during interpreting, and further studies could address these areas by also investigating these strategy uses across language pairs, text type, or level of proficiency. It might also be informative for training to explore what cognitive factors induce omission instead of simplification.

References

- Blum-Kulka, S., & Levenston, E. Lexical simplification universals C Faerch and G Kasper (Eds.), P. 119–139 in Strategies in interlanguage communication. Longman
- Gile, D. (2009). Edited by Luciana C. de Almeida & Elizabeth F. B. V. de Oliveira. (2017). Basic concepts and models for interpreter and translator training (2. ed.). John Benjamins
- Kalina, S. (1998) & (2007). Translation Strategies in Interpreting: Theoretical Foundations, Empirical Case Studies, Didactic Consequences. Gunter Narr Verlag
- Laviosa, S. (2002). Every day papers on corpus-based translation studies: Theory, findings, applications Rodopi