

## How Does Student Interpreters' Interpreting Performance Relate to Their Performance in Summarizing?

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### Abstract

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Summarizing used as an exercise in interpreting training mainly aims to promote interpreting efficiency. So far, however, how student interpreters' interpreting performance relates to their performance in summarizing remains obscure, let alone how the relation may change during interpreting training. The current study thus takes on a longitudinal approach, investigating 62 student interpreters' performance in a consecutive interpreting task from Language B/L2 to Language A/L1 and their performance in a post-interpreting summarizing task (in Language A) at two stages (the beginning and the end) of their first-year interpreting training. Quantitative analyses resulted in three major findings: (1) Student interpreters had better performance both in interpreting and in summarizing at the end of interpreting training than at the beginning; (2) Student interpreters' performance in interpreting had a significant positive correlation with their performance in summarizing, with the correlation becoming stronger at the end of interpreting training than at the beginning; (3) Student interpreters' performance in summarizing at the beginning of interpreting training significantly predicted their development in interpreting performance (both overall interpreting performance and performance in information accuracy and completeness). Pedagogical implications are discussed.

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**Keywords:** interpreting training, student interpreter, summarizing, consecutive interpreting, longitudinal

### 1. Introduction

Interpreting is a cognitively-demanding task. Two of its major challenges to interpreters are input ephemerality and output immediacy (Kao & Craigie, 2013; Pöchhacker, 2004; Setton, 2002), due to which interpreters have to develop high efficiency in both source language (SL) comprehension and target language (TL) reformulation. To assist student interpreters attaining the efficiency required, interpreting instructors employ exercises of various types (see a review in Jones, 2014), among which an important one is summarizing, in particular summarizing the SL input immediately after interpreting (named "post-interpreting summarizing") in either written or oral form.

Based on benefits of summarizing as an exercise on interpreting efficiency (Meyer, 1989; Niedzielski & Kummer, 1989), there are three a priori rationales for the use of post-interpreting summarizing as an exercise (which is usually introduced to student interpreters before interpreting) in promoting interpreting proficiency: (1) Acknowledging a summarizing task that follows the interpreting task would require student interpreters' faithfulness to the SL information during interpreting; (2) Acknowledging a summarizing task that follows the interpreting task would encourage students to take a global approach in SL listening, which can in turn improve their comprehension of the details (especially the underlying logic of the SL input); (3) Acknowledging a summarizing task that follows the interpreting task would require students to weigh the importance of every SL message, which helps avoiding verbosity and redundancy in TL reformulation.

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Owing to absence of empirical research on post-interpreting summarizing, however, how student interpreters' performance in this exercise is related to their interpreting performance is not yet understood, let alone how the potential relation may change during interpreting training. Therefore, the present study adopts a longitudinal approach in exploring how student interpreters' interpreting performance relates to their performance in post-interpreting summarizing. Post-interpreting summarizing as an exercise is commonly seen in training programs of consecutive interpreting (CI), which as an interpreting mode features summary and recall, and the present study thus focuses on CI.

## 2. Research background

Although summarizing is widely used as an exercise/technique in translating and interpreting training (e.g., Jones, 2014; Niedzielski & Kummer, 1989), little empirical research has been done on how interpreting performance relates to performance in summarizing. Darò & Fabbro (1994) compared two groups of advanced student interpreters in their performance of short-story recalling, with one group recalling the story after they had listened to the story and the other group recalling after they had done simultaneous interpreting (SI) with the story as the SL input. The study further separated the participants into four groups and, still via a between-group design, compared their performance in recalling digits (i.e. their digit span) after listening to the digit, after shadowing the digit (i.e., repeating it out loud), after listening to the digit with articulatory suppression (i.e., listening to the digit while uttering irrelevant syllables), and after simultaneously translating the digit. The results showed that story recalling after SI was not so good as after solely listening to the story. Moreover, digit spans of the participants who (before recalling) listened to the digit, of those who shadowed the digit, and of those who listened with articulatory suppression were found larger than the span of those who did SI (before recall). These findings seemed to show that interpreting may reduce the efficiency of recalling the SL input (either short stories or digits), but due to the scarcity in related previous empirical research, this potential reducing effect of interpreting on one's recall of the input still needs further investigation.

To explore the relationship between post-interpreting summarizing performance and interpreting performance, the present study adopting a longitudinal approach investigates student interpreters' performances in these two tasks at two stages of their first-year CI training. To avoid potential weakness brought in by a small sample of participants in empirical studies, we collect data from 62 participants, whose Language A /L1 is Chinese and Language B /L2 is English. In accordance with the students' interpreting training curriculum, we focus on CI from Language B to Language A ("B-to-A CI" for short hereafter). The present research is intended to answer three major research questions, with potential change in the relation between post-interpreting summarizing and interpreting emphasized: (1) *How does student interpreters' interpreting performance change with interpreting training? And how does student interpreters' post-interpreting summarizing performance change with interpreting training?* (2) *How does interpreting performance relate to post-interpreting summarizing performance at the beginning of interpreting training? And how does this relationship change with interpreting training?* (3) *Does student interpreters' post-interpreting summarizing performance at the beginning of interpreting training predict their development in interpreting performance?*

## 3. Research design

### 3.1 Participants

We asked 62 university undergraduate students who studied English as their major in a foreign studies university in China to finish a B-to-A (English-to-Chinese) CI task at the beginning of their one-year interpreting training programme (in the 2<sup>nd</sup> month, i.e., Stage 1) and when they finished this programme (in the 10<sup>th</sup> month, i.e., Stage 2). During this academic year, the participants took four translation courses and four interpreting courses. In each interpreting course, the participants had an 80-minute class every week, 16 weeks in total. Moreover, they were asked to spend twice as much as the class time in practice after class (mainly in the form of interpreting exercise). The student interpreters, who learned English as a foreign language in China, were unbalanced Chinese-English bilinguals in general. They had spent ten years in learning English before they were enrolled in the interpreting training programme and had passed the Test for English Majors Band 4 (TEM4), which is administered annually to university students majoring in English in China by the National Advisory Commission on Foreign Language Teaching in Higher Education and is granted nationwide as proof of English proficiency (Cheng, 2008; Jin & Fan, 2011). Their average score in TEM 4 was 70.44 (SD=6.51) (marked out of 100), which was higher than the national average 60.09.

### 3.2 Materials and procedure

*Materials.* We adapted a CI task from an eight-minute speech given by a male speechmaker about a promotion of laptops for children. The original speech was delivered at an average rate of 143 words per minute.

As the participants were unbalanced Chinese-English bilinguals and first-year student interpreters, we divided the speech into segments consisting of two to three sentences. The segment length was considered appropriate for the present participants according to three pieces of evidence collected from (1) a pilot study with 20 participants from the same population as the participants of the main study, (2) judgments on the task's difficulty level from five experienced interpreting instructors who were working at the same university as our participants, and (3) a questionnaire on material appropriateness after the CI task in the main study. Details about the design of this CI task could be found in Cai *et al.* (2015).

*Procedure of CI test.* At Stage 1, participants took the CI test in a lab for interpreting training. During the test, they listened to one segment at a time and, at the end of each segment, they were cued to start interpreting. According to our pilot study, the duration allowed for translating each segment was 1.5 times the duration of the segment itself. At the end of the interpreting time, participants heard a signal followed by a brief interval. Afterwards, participants listened to a new segment. Both note taking and reference to the notes were allowed. At Stage 2 when the student interpreters had received another eight months' interpreting training, the participants took the CI test again following the procedure the same as at Stage 1.

*Procedure of summarizing.* Immediately after the CI test at either stage, participants were asked to write a summary (150 to 200 words) of the SL input in Language A in no more than 15 minutes.

*Scoring of interpreting performance.* Two interpreting instructors (who were also professional interpreters with 5 years of interpreting experience on average) listened to recordings of the participant's interpreting output and rated their CI performance based on the same scoring criteria (inter-rater coefficient = .95). This criteria of scoring CI performance followed the criteria of interpreting performance generally accepted in CI training programmes in China, according to which a participant's total score (100%) consists of two parts: (1) information accuracy and completeness ("Information" henceforth), which occupies 67%, and (2) TL grammar and appropriateness ("TL expressions" henceforth), which takes up 33%.

*Scoring of summarizing performance.* The scoring of summarizing focuses on two issues: (1) accuracy and completeness in summarizing the critical SL messages and (2) logic of the summarized messages. Two university English teachers rated the participants' summaries independently based on the same scoring criteria and when there was controversy in rating, they discussed until a consensus was reached (inter-rater coefficient = .93). Each participant's final score in this task was the average of the scores given by the two raters, with nine points as the full mark (for there were nine pieces of critical information in the SL).

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Performance in summarizing and in interpreting at two stages

As demonstrated in Table 1, our student interpreters' performance in summarizing was rated 1.50 (SD = 1.02) on average at Stage 1, with the score increasing significantly to 2.20 (SD = 1.16) at Stage 2 ( $Z = -4.47, p = .000 < .01$ ). Meanwhile, the participants' overall score in interpreting rose significantly from 60.16 (SD = 14.84) on average at Stage 1 to 66.24 (SD = 13.55) at Stage 2 ( $Z = -5.28, p = .000 < .01$ ), with the sub-score in Information increasing significantly from 36.53 (SD = 11.32) at the former stage to 41.99 (SD = 9.90) at the latter ( $Z = -5.44, p = .000 < .01$ ). These results show that after one-year interpreting training, our student interpreters improved in their interpreting performance (especially performance in Information). Besides, the results indicated that these beginner student interpreters also made progress in their comprehension and recall of the SL information.

**Table 1 Student interpreters' summarizing performance and interpreting performance at two stages (N=62)**

	Stage 1		Stage 2		t/Z	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Summarizing performance	1.50	1.02	2.20	1.16	-4.47**	
Interpreting performance	<i>Information</i>	<i>36.53</i>	<i>11.32</i>	<i>41.99</i>	<i>9.90</i>	<i>-5.44**</i>
	<i>TL expressions</i>	<i>23.64</i>	<i>4.29</i>	<i>24.24</i>	<i>4.60</i>	<i>-1.46</i>
	Overall score	60.16	14.84	66.24	13.55	-5.28**

\*\* :  $p < .01$ .

## 4.2 Relation between summarizing performance and interpreting performance

### 4.2.1 How summarizing performance correlated with interpreting performance

As shown in Table 2, the correlation between student interpreters' summarizing performance and their overall interpreting score was found positive and significant at Stage 1 ( $r = .52, p = .000 < .01$ ), which grew in strength at Stage 2 ( $r = .61, p = .000 < .01$ ). At Stage 1, significant positive correlations were also found between the summarizing score and the two interpreting sub-scores, including Information ( $r = .51, p = .000 < .01$ ) and TL expressions ( $r = .46, p = .000 < .01$ ). Furthermore, the two correlations became stronger at Stage 2 ( $r = .60, p = .000 < .01$ ;  $r = .52, p = .000 < .01$ ). These results indicate that the student interpreters who had more efficient comprehension and recall of the SL information tended to interpret better, and vice versa. Moreover, this relation between summarizing performance and interpreting performance was strengthened after the first-year interpreting training.

**Table 2 Correlation ( $r$ ) between student interpreters' summarizing performance and interpreting performance at two stages (N=62)**

	Overall interpreting score		Information		TL expression	
	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 1	Stage 2
summarizing performance	.52**	.61**	.51**	.60**	.46**	.52**

\*\* :  $p < .01$ .

### 4.2.2 Whether summarizing performance predicted development in interpreting performance

As significant correlations were found between student interpreters' summarizing performance and interpreting performance, a question was raised whether summarizing performance (i.e., performance in a commonly-used exercise in interpreting training) can predict development in interpreting performance (i.e., the major target of interpreting training). In order to answer this question, we conducted three hierarchical regressions (see Table 3). In the first regression with the overall interpreting score at Stage 2 as the dependent variable, we entered the overall interpreting score at Stage 1 accordingly into the regression at the first step so as to control autoregressive effect (i.e., statistically eliminate the potential influence of pretest on post-test). Then we entered the summarizing score at Stage 1 at the second step of the regression. Results show that with autoregressive effect controlled, the summarizing score at Stage 1 significantly explained 2% variance in the overall interpreting score at Stage 2 ( $\Delta R^2 = .02 = .02 \times 100\% = 2\%$ ,  $\Delta F = 4.39, p = .04 < .05$ ). Following a similar procedure of analysis (see Regression 2 and 3, Table 3), we found that the summarizing score at Stage 1 significantly explained 3% variance in Information at Stage 2 ( $\Delta R^2 = .03 = .03 \times 100\% = 3\%$ ,  $\Delta F = 5.77, p = .019 < .05$ ), and did not significantly explain any variance in TL expressions at the later stage ( $\Delta F = 1.71, p = .20 > .05$ ). These results indicate that our student interpreters' summarizing performance at the beginning of this one-year interpreting training can predict their development in interpreting performance (from the beginning to the end of the training), especially their improvement in information accuracy and completeness.

**Table 3 Whether and how much summarizing performance at Stage 1 predicted development in interpreting performance (from Stage 1 to Stage 2) (N=62)**

Regression	Dependent variable	Step	Independent variable	R <sup>2</sup>	ΔR <sup>2</sup>	ΔF	β
1	Overall interpreting score at Stage 2	1	Overall interpreting score at Stage 1	.71	.71	148.51**	.77
		2	Summarizing score at Stage 1	.73	.02	4.39*	2.19
2	Information at Stage 2	1	Information at Stage 1	.69	.69	135.78	.73
		2	Summarizing score at Stage 1	.72	.03	5.77*	1.85
3	TL expressions at Stage 2	1	TL expressions at Stage 1	.50	.50	59.54**	.76
		2	Summarizing score at Stage 1	.51	.01	1.71	.61

\*\* $p < .01$ ; \* $.01 \leq p < .05$ .

## 5. Discussion

The present longitudinal study investigated 62 student interpreters' performance in summarizing and in interpreting at two stages (the beginning and the end) of a one-year interpreting programme. Moreover, the present study also examined the relation between performances in these two tasks as well as change in the relation during the year. There were three major findings. First, compared with performance at the beginning of interpreting training, our student interpreters' performance in summarizing was significantly better at the end of the training, and so was their interpreting performance (especially in information accuracy and completeness). Consistent with previous research on student interpreters' development in interpreting performance (Cai, Dong, Zhao, & Lin, 2015), our findings suggest that beginner student interpreters' interpreting proficiency improved in general after one year's interpreting training. Our findings also indicate that student interpreters' comprehension and recall of the SL information, which is an integral element of interpreting proficiency, became better after this one-year training. The improved comprehension and recall of the SL information appears inconsistent with the previous finding in Darò & Fabbro (1994), where the performance in story-recalling and the performance in digit span after SI were found reduced when compared with the performances in the same tasks after listening, the performances after shadowing, and the performances after listening with articular suppression. In fact, what the current study explored and revealed (via a within-group-design longitudinal approach) was the trend in student interpreters' development of SL comprehension and recall during a relatively long period of time (in this case, one-year interpreting training), rather than how their SL comprehension and recall may differ before and after one interpreting task (which was investigated in the previous study via a cross-sectional research design). Besides, the interpreting mode that the present study focused on (i.e., CI) was different from the mode in the previous study (which was SI). Therefore, further studies (both longitudinal ones and cross-sectional ones) are still needed both about potential dynamics in the relation between summarizing and interpreting and about potential influence exercised by interpreting on summarizing and recall.

Another finding is that interpreting performance (overall score along with the two sub-scores) had significant positive correlations with summarizing performance at both stages, with the correlation being stronger after one-year interpreting training. These findings indicate that student interpreters who had more efficient comprehension and recall of the SL messages tend to perform better in interpreting performance. Although this should not be surprising in retrospect since SL comprehension played a core role in both summarizing and interpreting (in particular to our participants as unbalanced bilinguals and first-year student interpreters), the close relation between the two tasks indicates to interpreting instructors that improvement in one task may promote performance in the other. Therefore, a proper amount of exercise that helps summarizing information more efficiently, such as retrieval exercise (e.g., Karpicke & Roediger, 2008; Zhou, Ma, Li, & Cui, 2013) can be thus introduced in interpreting training programs. One more significant finding to interpreting instructors and researchers is that summarizing performance at the beginning of interpreting training predicted the development of interpreting performance during the training. As is known, B-to-A interpreting is a commonly-used aptitude test task in selecting candidates for interpreting training (e.g., Keiser, 1978; Russo, 2011), and yet it may not be efficient in selecting those who have no interpreting training before but have strong potentials (e.g., language proficiency, general knowledge, personal traits) of being a good interpreter.

Our finding on the predicting power of post-interpreting summarizing suggests that this task can be adopted as an aptitude test supplementary to interpreting tests, mainly examining the auditory comprehension ability and expression succinctness of candidates who have no precedent interpreting experience.

## 6. Conclusion

The present longitudinal study first investigated student interpreters' developments in summarizing and in CI performance, and then examined the relationship between performances in these two tasks. The results indicate that our beginner student interpreters improved both in summarizing and in interpreting (either overall performance or performance in information accuracy and completeness) after one-year interpreting training. Besides, their performance in summarizing summary had a significant positive correlation with their interpreting performance, with the relation strengthened at the end of the training. Moreover, student interpreters' performance in summarizing at the beginning of interpreting training significantly predicted their development in interpreting performance, particularly information accuracy and completeness. Due to the close relation between post-interpreting summarizing and interpreting, sufficient exercise in summarizing and recalling of the SL input is needed in interpreting training, and post-interpreting summarizing can be included into aptitude test batteries for selecting candidates of interpreter trainees.

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