THE ROLE OF PRAGMATIC EQUIVALENCE IN SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETATION: MAINTAINING SPEAKER INTENT AND CULTURAL NUANCE

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Abstract: *This article explores the concept of pragmatic equivalence in simultaneous interpretation, focusing on how interpreters maintain the speaker's intent, tone, and cultural nuances across languages. Unlike lexical or syntactic equivalence, pragmatic equivalence emphasizes the importance of the implied meaning, cultural context, and the overall communicative purpose of the source message. The paper addresses challenges that interpreters face in conveying emotions, politeness levels, and cultural references that may not directly translate between languages. It also discusses strategies for preserving speaker intent, such as using culturally appropriate alternatives and adapting non-verbal cues into the spoken message. By examining real-world examples, the article illustrates how pragmatic equivalence can enhance the accuracy and effectiveness of interpretation, particularly in diplomatic, legal, and intercultural communication settings. The findings emphasize the role of pragmatic competence in professional interpretation and its impact on the success of cross-cultural communication.*

Keywords: pragmatic equivalence, simultaneous interpretation, speaker intent, cultural nuance, non-verbal cues, cultural adaptation, interpretation strategies, politeness, cross-cultural communication, professional interpreting.

Introduction. Simultaneous interpretation is a demanding process that requires the interpreter to convey spoken messages from one language to another in real-time. Beyond simply converting words and structures, interpreters must capture the underlying meaning, intent, and cultural nuances of the speaker's message. One of the key aspects of successful interpretation is achieving pragmatic equivalence, which refers to the accurate reflection of not only the literal content of a message but also the communicative intentions, emotions, and cultural contexts embedded within it. Pragmatic equivalence is particularly important in settings where cultural subtleties and the speaker's intent are crucial to the communication's success. In diplomatic, legal, and intercultural communication, for instance, misinterpreting a speaker's tone, level of politeness, or cultural references can lead to misunderstandings, miscommunication, or even conflict[51].

Therefore, pragmatic equivalence requires interpreters to go beyond lexical and syntactic fidelity, focusing instead on preserving the speaker's purpose, the intended effect on the audience, and the cultural elements that shape the message. The challenge of pragmatic equivalence in simultaneous interpretation stems from several factors. First, different languages encode politeness, formality, and emotional nuance in diverse ways. For example, languages like Japanese rely heavily on honorifics to in-

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[51] Gile D. Basic Concepts and Models for Interpreter and Translator Training. John Benjamins, 1995. – pp. 75-92.

dicate respect and social hierarchy, while languages like English often communicate politeness more indirectly through tone or phrasing. Interpreters must navigate these differences and adapt their interpretation to suit the cultural expectations of the target audience. Second, cultural references and idiomatic expressions may not have direct equivalents in other languages, requiring interpreters to find creative solutions to convey the same meaning. For instance, a cultural reference that resonates deeply with one audience might be meaningless to another unless it is explained or replaced with a culturally appropriate alternative.

This article examines the role of pragmatic equivalence in simultaneous interpretation, focusing on how interpreters maintain speaker intent and cultural nuance[52]. By analyzing the specific challenges that arise in achieving pragmatic equivalence, as well as the strategies interpreters use to overcome them, the article provides insights into how pragmatic competence enhances the overall quality and effectiveness of interpretation[53]. Special attention is given to real-world examples in various settings, demonstrating how interpreters successfully bridge the gap between languages and cultures to ensure accurate, meaningful communication.

Figure 1: Main part of the topic.

Understanding pragmatic equivalence in simultaneous interpretation

Challenges in achieving pragmatic equivalence

Strategies for achieving pragmatic equivalence

The importance of pragmatic competence in professional interpretation
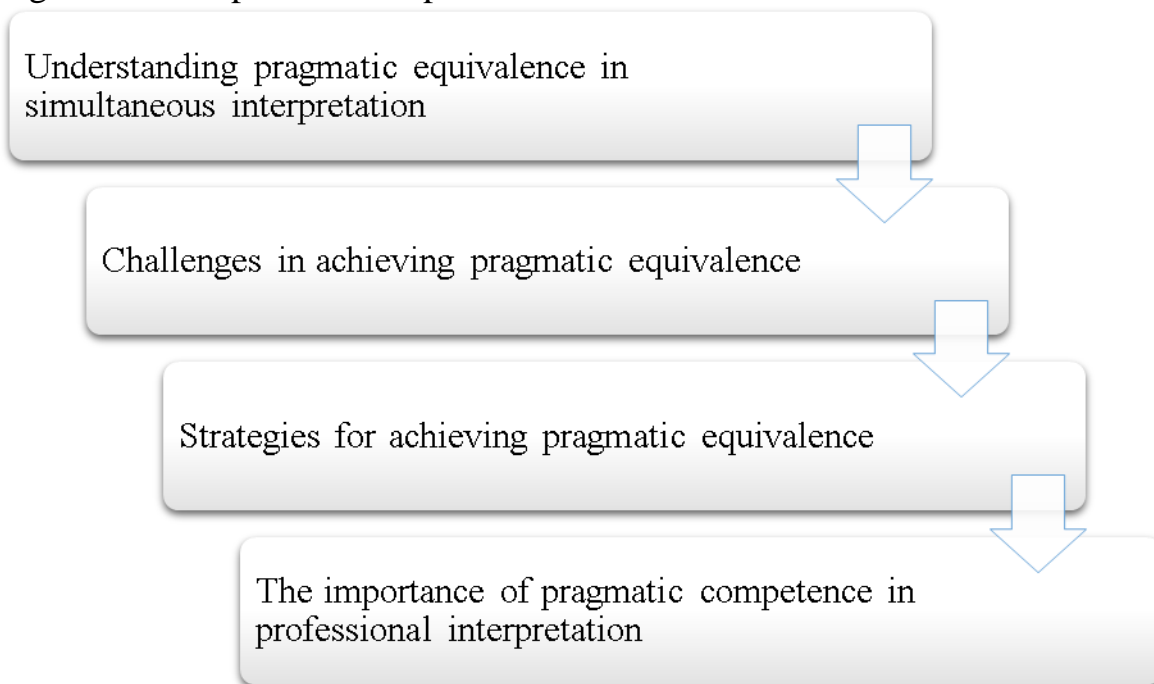
1. Understanding pragmatic equivalence in simultaneous interpretation

Pragmatic equivalence in simultaneous interpretation goes beyond simply translating words and phrases. It involves conveying the speaker's intent, tone, and implied meanings, as well as accounting for cultural nuances that shape communication. Pragmatic elements include aspects like politeness, formality, indirectness, and cultural references that carry significant weight in shaping the message. Therefore, achieving pragmatic equivalence is essential for maintaining the integrity of the speaker's message across languages. In simultaneous interpretation, the challenge is

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[52] Pöchhacker F. Introducing Interpreting Studies. Routledge, 2004. – pp. 132-150.
[53] Baker M. In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation. Routledge, 1992. – pp. 97-118.

compounded by time constraints and the need to process large amounts of information rapidly. Interpreters do not have the luxury of pausing or revising their work; they must make instantaneous decisions about how to preserve the pragmatic force of the original message. This makes pragmatic equivalence a critical factor in ensuring that the target audience understands not just the words but the underlying message and its intent.

2. Challenges in achieving pragmatic equivalence

One of the primary challenges in maintaining pragmatic equivalence is dealing with cultural nuances. Different cultures have distinct ways of communicating, and these cultural factors influence how messages are framed and interpreted. For example, in many Asian cultures, indirectness and the use of euphemisms are preferred to maintain social harmony, while in Western cultures, directness is often valued for its clarity. If an interpreter fails to adapt to these cultural preferences, the message may be misunderstood or considered inappropriate in the target language. Consider the case of a high-level diplomatic meeting where the speaker uses indirect language to avoid causing offense.

An interpreter working into a more direct language like English must decide how to convey the speaker's indirectness without losing the underlying message[54]. Direct translation might come across as too blunt, whereas maintaining indirectness might obscure the intended meaning. This balancing act between cultural expectations and the need for clarity is a key challenge in achieving pragmatic equivalence. Politeness and formality are often encoded differently across languages. In some languages, such as Korean or Japanese, politeness is heavily embedded in verb forms and honorifics, which signal respect and social hierarchy. In contrast, English relies more on tone and phrasing to convey politeness. When interpreting from a language with a formal system of politeness into one that is less formal, interpreters must find ways to preserve the speaker's intended level of respect without sounding overly stiff or formal in the target language. For example, in a courtroom setting where a judge speaks formally and with authority, an interpreter must ensure that the judge's tone of authority is maintained while adapting the formality to suit the conventions of the target language.

Failure to achieve this can affect the perception of the judge's authority and the formality of the proceedings[55]. Emotion is another critical element that contributes to the pragmatic force of a message. Speakers often use tone, pitch, and emphasis to convey their feelings, whether it is enthusiasm, frustration, or sarcasm. Interpreters must be sensitive to these emotional cues and ensure that the target audience receives a message that reflects the speaker's emotional state. However, languages differ in how they express emotion, which can complicate the interpreter's task. For instance, interpreting sarcasm is notoriously difficult because it often relies on tone rather than words. If the target language lacks similar tonal cues or if the audience is unfamiliar with the speaker's style, the sarcastic remark might be lost, misunderstood, or inter-

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[54] Setton R. Simultaneous Interpretation: A Cognitive-Pragmatic Analysis. John Benjamins, 1999. – pp. 213-230.
[55] Hatim B., Mason I. The Translator as Communicator. Routledge, 1997. – pp. 104-121.

preted literally. In such cases, the interpreter might need to subtly adjust the phrasing or add a qualifying remark to convey the intended emotion.

3. Strategies for achieving pragmatic equivalence

One of the most effective strategies interpreters use to maintain pragmatic equivalence is adaptation. Rather than translating word-for-word, interpreters often paraphrase the message to ensure that it retains the same impact in the target language. This technique is particularly useful when dealing with idiomatic expressions, cultural references, or politeness markers that have no direct equivalent. For instance, if a speaker uses an idiom that would be incomprehensible to the target audience, the interpreter may choose to replace it with a culturally appropriate equivalent or explain its meaning succinctly[56]. This form of adaptation ensures that the message remains understandable while preserving its pragmatic effect. Interpreters frequently rely on the broader context of the speech to infer the speaker's intent and make pragmatic adjustments.

Contextualization allows interpreters to interpret not only the words spoken but also the surrounding circumstances, relationships, and cultural settings that shape the communication. This helps interpreters make informed decisions about how to render culturally specific references, tone, or politeness levels. For example, in a business negotiation, an interpreter might be able to gauge the level of formality required by considering the power dynamics between the speaker and the audience. If the speaker is addressing a senior executive, the interpreter may opt for more formal phrasing, even if the original language is more casual, to reflect the appropriate tone of respect. Pragmatic equivalence can also be supported by anticipation, where interpreters predict upcoming content based on their knowledge of the topic or the speaker's style. This allows interpreters to plan their interpretation and choose strategies that best maintain the speaker's intent. For instance, an interpreter familiar with the speaker's habitual use of humor or rhetorical questions can anticipate these moments and prepare to convey them effectively in the target language. In addition, thorough preparation before interpretation sessions can significantly aid in achieving pragmatic equivalence.

Interpreters often research the cultural background, context, and speech style of the speaker to better understand the pragmatic elements of the communication[57]. This preparation helps them make quicker decisions during the interpretation, particularly in terms of tone, cultural references, and politeness strategies. Although simultaneous interpretation is primarily concerned with spoken language, non-verbal cues play a significant role in communication. Facial expressions, gestures, and body language often accompany verbal messages, adding additional layers of meaning. Interpreters need to be aware of these non-verbal cues and how they influence the message's pragmatics. For example, if a speaker uses a particular gesture or facial expression to reinforce sarcasm, the interpreter must decide how to incorporate this non-verbal element into the verbal interpretation. This might involve adjusting the tone of voice,

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[56] House J. Translation Quality Assessment: Past and Present. Routledge, 2015. – pp. 63-79.
[57] Katan D. Translating Cultures: An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators. St. Jerome Publishing, 2004. – pp. 45-67.

adding emphasis to certain words, or using a phrasing that mirrors the speaker's intended sarcasm.

4. The importance of pragmatic competence in professional interpretation

Pragmatic competence the ability to understand and convey the pragmatic aspects of language is essential for interpreters to ensure accurate and effective communication. Pragmatic competence allows interpreters to navigate the subtleties of speaker intent, cultural nuance, and context-specific meanings that go beyond literal word-for-word translation[58]. In professional settings, such as diplomacy or legal proceedings, pragmatic errors can have significant consequences. Misinterpreting the level of formality, failing to convey tone, or misunderstanding cultural references can lead to diplomatic faux pas, legal miscommunications, or strained relationships between parties. Therefore, professional interpreters must not only have linguistic competence but also a deep understanding of the pragmatic elements of communication to succeed in their roles.

Conclusion. Pragmatic equivalence in simultaneous interpretation is a complex, multifaceted challenge that requires interpreters to maintain speaker intent, tone, and cultural nuances across languages. While lexical and syntactic accuracy are important, it is the pragmatic elements that often determine whether the interpretation resonates with the target audience as the speaker intended. By employing strategies like adaptation, contextualization, anticipation, and sensitivity to non-verbal cues, interpreters can navigate the intricacies of pragmatic equivalence effectively. Pragmatic competence is crucial for interpreters to facilitate clear, culturally appropriate communication, ensuring that the message's meaning, emotion, and intent are fully preserved.

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[58] Leanza Y. Roles of Community Interpreters in Pediatrics as Seen by Interpreters, Physicians, and Researchers. Journal of Community Interpreting, 2005. – pp. 45-62.