The Application of Dynamic RDA Model in Interpreter Training

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Abstract. In the interpreting training models, whether it is the famous "Guangdong Foreign Languages University Model" or the "Xiamen University Model", their main teaching routes mostly focus on "skills", emphasizing students' practical interpreting abilities, with little involvement in the cultivation of interpreting theoretical awareness. Theory has the functions of explaining, predicting, and guiding practice, which can help students trace the causes of interpreting difficulties, make predictions in advance, and provide action guidelines. Based on the interpreting major in independent colleges, this paper explores the feasibility of applying the Dynamic RDA Model in interpreting teaching through literature reading and questionnaire surveys.

Keywords: Dynamic RDA Model; Interpreting Teaching; Interpreting Theory; Feasibility Analysis.

1   Introduction

Danica Seleskovitch and Marianne Lederer, the representatives of the Interpretive School, proposed in their co-authored book "Teaching Interpreting: Theory and Practice" that "interpreting teaching should be based on theory. Theory can become pure teaching content, or it can be used to explain, remind, or quote when correcting students' mistakes, especially when students are in the basic stage of impromptu translation." [4] Through explaining phenomena and predicting future trends, theory can effectively guide students' practice and help them focus their attention on their weaknesses, thus improving their decision-making ability through targeted practice. Interpreters who possess a certain cross-disciplinary interpreting theory often have clearer goals and more flexible methods when engaging in interpreting practice than those who are clueless about theory. However, with the development and expansion of interpreting education, the issue of weak interpreting theoretical awareness still exists in current interpreting teaching. Most interpreting teachers organize classroom teaching based on their introspection and experience, leading to a lack of systematicness and scientificity in the classroom, making students unable to grasp the overall picture when facing long

interpreting practice materials. Ultimately, students fail to grasp the essentials, work hard but with little results, and give up halfway.

Gile (2011) emphasized that interpreting teaching should focus on students' translation process rather than translation results. Then how to guide students' interpreting process, so that they have clearer goals and more flexible methods and strategies to solve cognitive obstacles and difficulties in bilingual information processing.[2] Yang Ping (2001) proposed a new pragmatic theoretical model: the Relevance-Adaptation Model. While emphasizing cognitive relevance, this model also explains the specific contextual and linguistic components of language choice. [3] However, this model does not mention how the relevance and adaptation of meaning arise during the interpreting process. Therefore, Lai Yihua (2014) proposed the Interpreting Dynamic RDA Model in his book "Interpreting: Communication, Pragmatics, and Cognition", borrowing from the Relevance Theory and Adaptation Theory of cognitive pragmatics and the Deverbalization Theory of interpreting, and proposed a "comprehensive model" focusing on the study of both interpreting theory and skills.[3] The innovation of this model lies in its combination of this pragmatic theoretical model with the interpreting process, guiding the three stages of listening comprehension, STM and note-taking, and languages expression in the Interpretation Theory[5] with relevant theories, which has certain implications for interpreting teaching and practice. Therefore, this article will adopt questionnaire surveys to understand the difficulties and obstacles students encounter in the current stage of interpretation learning in terms of listening comprehension, STM and note-taking, and languages expression, and explore the feasibility of the RDA dynamic interpretation model in solving the above problems.

2   Theoretical Framework

Sperber & Wilson's (1986) Relevance Theory views communication as an ostensive (speaker) - inferential (hearer) process. There are two intentions in the ostensive process: informative intention and communicative intention.[6] Verschueren's (1999) Adaptation Theory holds that the process of language use is a continuous process of linguistic choices. Language can be chosen because it is variable, negotiable, and adaptable.[3] Translation classroom teaching is an interactive construction process of translation autonomous learning under the guidance of teacher-translators and with student-translators as the center (Kiraly, 2000).[1] This process is both an ostensive-inferential process of searching for relevance and a dynamic adaptation process.

In interpretation activities, speakers, vocabulary, on-site equipment, and other factors may affect the interpreter's performance. Yang Ping(2001)suggests that relevance-adaptation is a dynamic process of mutual adaptation between contextual components (physical world, social world, and psychological world) and linguistic structures (phonemes, stress, intonation, lexical structure, length of sentence patterns, propositional structure, textual structure).[3] Therefore, to understand the current level of students' pragmatic awareness, this article selects factors related to intra-lingual information, such as keywords, unfamiliar words, and intra-lingual context, as well as extra-lingual factors such as the background information of the speech, the identity of the speaker,

and speaking style, as multiple-choice content in the questionnaire to investigate students' awareness of relevance-adaptation. To be specific, according to Dynamic RDA model, the awareness of relevance-adaptation refers to whether students have the awareness of inferring the communicative intention of the speaker based on such contextual components as the background of the speech, and the identity or language style of the speaker and choosing different language styles accordingly.

3   Questionnaire Survey

3.1   Questionnaire Design

The junior students in four English major classes at an independent college who have completed training in listening comprehension, note-taking, and language expression in traditional interpretation classes in the first semester were selected. After that, they were assigned the task of consecutive interpretation for two speeches delivered by the same speaker (Hillary Clinton) in formal and informal settings. They filled out the questionnaire to analyze and compare the difficulties they encountered in listening comprehension, STM and notetaking, and language expression strategies. The feasibility of applying the dynamic RDA model in interpretation to address these issues was also discussed. A total of 123 questionnaires were distributed to the four classes, and 120 valid questionnaires were obtained. The questionnaire is non-scaled and contains seven questions. The first three are basic conceptual questions, and the last four are task-related subjective and objective questions. Among them, the first basic conceptual question examines students' awareness of relevance and the order of importance of various elements in the cognitive process during the listening comprehension stage. The second and third questions assess students' awareness of adaptation and the order of importance of various elements in the cognitive process during the language expression stage. The last four questions investigate the impact of these differences in awareness on their production performance during real interpretation tasks. Finally, the data were organized and analyzed using Excel and SPSSAU. The questionnaire demonstrated a high level of internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.81.

3.2   Analysis of Questionnaire Results

3.2.1 Analysis of Basic Conceptual Questionnaire Results

Among the factors that affect listening comprehension in interpreting as showin in Fig.1, the top four are unfamiliar words (94.2%), background information of the speech (88.3%), key words (85%), and intra-lingual context (84.2%). Notably, 10% of the students actively added other factors such as speaking speed, accent, and interpreter's condition, while the proportions of those who chose the identity of the speaker and speaking style accounted for 45.8% and 65.8%, respectively. Here, contextual clues emphasizes whether students have a discourse awareness to process intra-lingua information, while background information, speaking style, and identity of the speaker focus on whether students have a sense of using extra-lingual information for prediction. The questionnaire data indicates that students still heavily rely on words when

comprehending the speech. Although background information is also an effective resource for their understanding, the identity and speaking style of the speaker are not as important as unfamiliar words and key words in their cognitive scope, indicating a lack of relevance awareness.
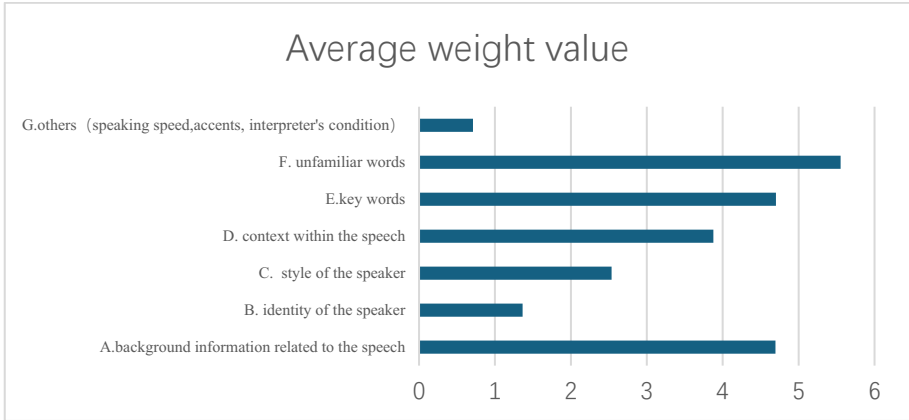

Fig. 1. Factors Influencing Listening Comprehension and Their Order of Importance

Among the factors affecting production as shown in Fig.2, the order of importance is as follows: unfamiliar words (88.3%), context within the speech (81.7%), key words (80.8%), relevant background information of the speech (80%), the speaking style of the speaker (60.8%), and the identity of the speaker (52.5%). The results show that students are still greatly influenced by unfamiliar words during the organization and expression stage of interpretation. The importance of unfamiliar words is not only significantly higher than that of "extra-lingual" information such as speaking style and identity of the speaker, but also higher than that of intra-lingual context.
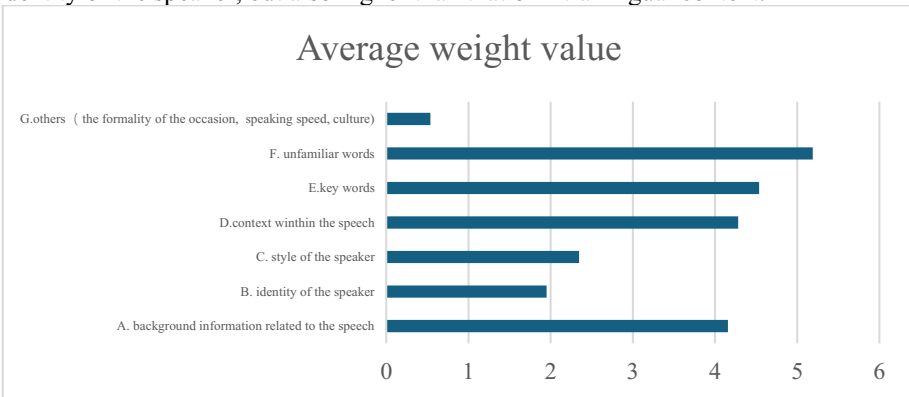

Fig. 2. Factors Influencing Language Expressions and Their Order of Importance

Regarding the factors that need to be paid attention to during production as shown in Fig.3, besides the generally recognized criteria in the interpretation community of "accuracy, fluency, and quick response," factors related to pragmatic awareness such

as the occasion of the speech, the speaking style of the speaker, and the purpose of the speech are also included. Among them, the top three are fluency in expression (97.5%), accuracy of meaning (96.7%), and syntactic smoothness (95%). Sentence completeness (82.5%), conformity with the style and tone of the specific occasion (78.3%), and conformity with the speaking style and purpose of the speaker (59.2%) follow. Most students realize that "accuracy" and "fluency" are very important in interpretation, far exceeding the importance of conforming to the style and tone of different contexts and the speaking style and purpose of the speaker. This indicates that they currently lack sufficient awareness of adapting to different contexts to choose appropriate language styles.
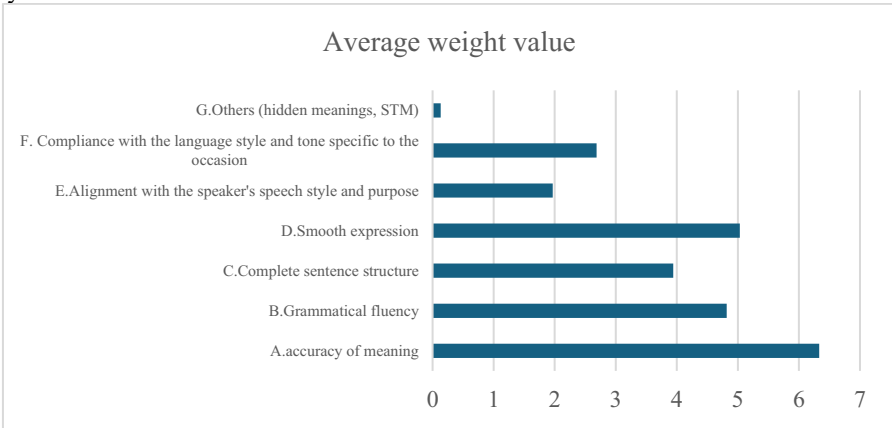

Fig. 3. Factors to Consider When Expressing and Their Order of Importance

3.2.2 Analysis of Task-Related Questionnaire Survey Results

Before this questionnaire survey, students were required to complete interpretation tasks for two materials. One was a speech excerpt (the first three minutes) by Hillary Clinton at the Fourth UN Conference on Women, and the other was an interview excerpt (about three minutes) on climate change issues during her first visit to China as the US Secretary of State. Background information and unfamiliar words were provided beforehand. Relevant questions were designed to investigate whether unfamiliar words and background information are helpful for listening comprehension and expression of interpretation. The questionnaire results are shown in (Fig. 4).
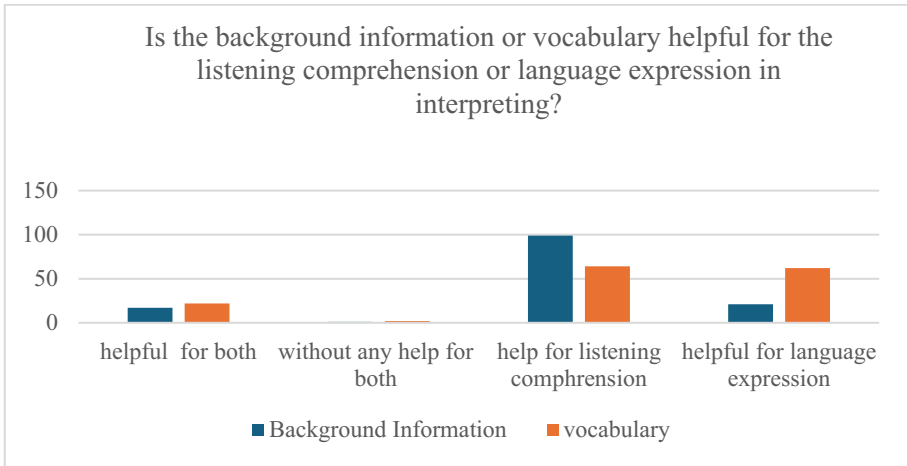
Fig. 4. The influence of background information and vocabulary

According to Fig. 4, only 0.8% of the participants believed that background information had no effect on their comprehension and expression, while 1.7% believed that vocabulary did not help with comprehension and expression. 14.2% and 18.3% of the participants acknowledged that background information and vocabulary were helpful to their interpretation performance, but they could not distinguish whether they played a role in the comprehension or expression phase of interpretation. Additionally, most of the participants believed that background information (82.5%) was more beneficial to listening comprehension than vocabulary (53.3%); comparatively, in the phase of production, the participants considered the impact of vocabulary (51.7%) to be far greater than the influence of background knowledge (17.5%).
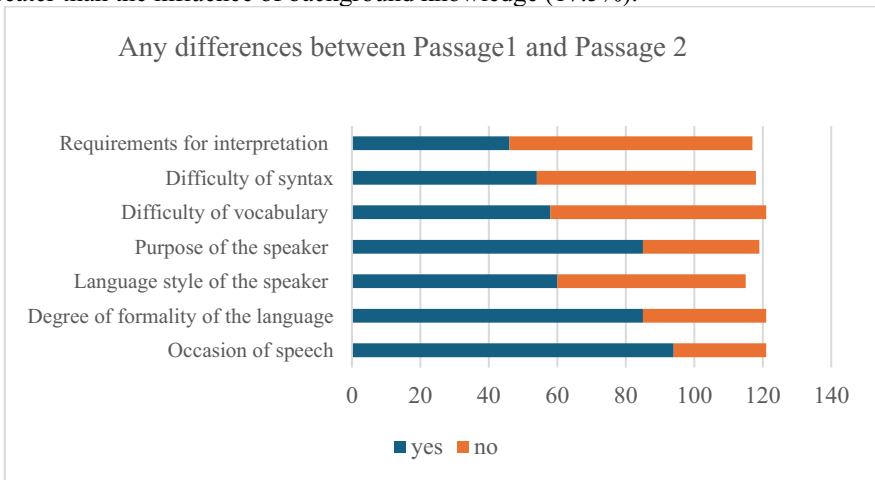

Fig. 5. The difference between Passage 1 and Passage 2

Concerning the differences between the two materials, after completing the interpretation task, the questionnaire required participants to briefly describe the differences between the two texts in terms of speaking occasion, formality of language style, language style and purpose of the speaker, vocabulary difficulty, syntactic difficulty, and requirements for interpretation (as shown in Fig. 5). 78.3% of the participants recognized the different occasions of the two texts (Passage 1 was a speech, Passage 2 was an interview, referred to as P1 and P2, respectively); 70.8% believed that their language styles differed (P1 was formal and official, while P2 was colloquial); 50% indicated that the language styles of the speakers were different (P1 was serious, while P2 was relaxed); 70.8% thought that the purposes of the speakers were distinct (P1 aimed to call for advocacy, while P2 aimed to share and express views); 48.3% and 45% of the participants stated that there were differences in vocabulary and syntactic difficulty between the two texts (P1 had easy vocabulary but sentences with parallelism, while P2 had mostly simple sentences but unfamiliar vocabulary), but 52.5% and 53.3% believed that there were no differences in vocabulary and syntax between the two texts; regarding the requirements for interpretation, 59.2% of the participants believed that there were no differences in the interpretation requirements for the two texts. This also reflects that although the participants had a certain awareness of language style, they did not have a consciousness of adapting their target language based on language style, register, and the speaker's language style.

4   Conclusion

4.1   About the Experimental Participants

Based on the analysis results, after completing the traditional interpretation skills training course in the first semester, during the listening comprehension stage, whether it was basic concepts or task-related questionnaire topics, most students still relied heavily on "unfamiliar words," believing that "unfamiliar words" not only significantly influenced their listening comprehension but also their target language expression. This explains why many students often struggle and fall behind during the interpretation process, and it also reflects that the participants have not yet established a good sense of relevance, making it difficult for them to use intra-lingual and extra-lingual information to infer the speaker's intended meaning. They also lack discourse awareness, and their understanding of meaning remains at the level of simply piecing together words and sentences, indicating significant shortcomings in pragmatic ability and strategies. Therefore, it is crucial to guide students to use extra-lingual information (contextual factors) to make predictions and inferences during the listening comprehension process.

Secondly, regarding spoken and written materials, although most participants can recognize the differences in source language styles, they find it difficult to adapt their target language organization and expression according to the specific speaking occasion or the speaker's style. Therefore, cultivating participants' awareness of language style and enabling them to master the ability to organize and express target language in different speaking situations and for different speaking styles, introducing the

theoretical perspective of Adaptation Theory to organize interpretation teaching, is also necessary.

4.2   About the Dynamic RDA Model for Interpretation

In light of this, Lai Yihua (2014) proposed the Dynamic RDA Model[3] for Interpretation, based on the Interpretive Theory of Translation put forward by the School of Interpreters in Paris. This model utilizes the theoretical advantages of Relevance Theory, the Interpretive Theory, and Adaptation Theory to guide the three processes of interpretation: listening comprehension, memory, and target language expression. However, during the literature review and questionnaire survey, it was found that in the stage of target language organization and expression, the content of the interpreter's adaptation to the target language is interrelated with the source language's intra-lingual information (language structure) and extra-lingual information (contextual factors), belonging to relevance-adaptation. The content of the interpreter's adaptation expression should be the result of the relevance in listening comprehension, rather than a simple correspondence between the three theories and the three stages of interpretation defined in the model.

Although the division of the theoretical roles in the Dynamic RDA Model for Interpretation is overly simplistic, its "comprehensive model" that focuses on interpretation skills still provides some inspiration for the design of basic-level interpretation teaching. Based on the characteristics of interpretation activities, this model divides interpretation teaching into three stages (listening comprehension, note-taking, and target language expression) and integrates the theoretical advantages of three theories (Relevance Theory, the Interpretive Theory, and Adaptation Theory) to guide the teaching and practice of interpretation at each stage. This has a good enlightening effect on traditional interpretation teaching, which is mainly based on teachers' introspection and experience. However, whether this model can improve the effectiveness of interpretation teaching in independent colleges requires further empirical research.

Acknowledgements

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