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THE USE OF CHUNKING IN CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETING

Introduction. Consecutive interpreting is among the most cognitively demanding language tasks. Interpreters have to listen to long passages, retain their meaning in their heads, and accurately recreate it in another language. It is very different from simultaneous interpreting, where one is processing and speaking almost simultaneously. In consecutive interpreting, most of the strain falls on working memory. To handle this, interpreters do not just need good language skills; they also need specific mental strategies to avoid overload. One of the most discussed strategies in this field is chunking – breaking speech down into smaller, meaningful segments.

Literature Review. Researchers in both Western and Ukrainian traditions have explored the role of chunking in interpretation. In Western studies, the cognitive aspects of interpreting are often examined through models focused on mental effort. For instance, Daniel Gile argues that interpreting means juggling listening, memory, and production – all competing for limited mental resources [1]. By organizing what they hear into chunks, interpreters can allocate those resources more efficiently. Cognitive psychology also shows that working memory functions better when information comes in meaningful groups rather than scattered bits.

Empirical studies reinforce this idea. Scholars such as Huang S., Li X., and Guo Y. find that chunking reduces cognitive overload by allowing interpreters to organize speech into structured units, which helps them understand and remember more easily [2]. Corpus-based research on real interpreting practice also shows that segmentation is key – especially in settings such as public speeches or institutional settings, where speech can be long and complex [4]. These findings make it clear: chunking is not just a linguistic trick. It is a core cognitive tool for successful interpreting.

Ukrainian scholars add their own insights. O. Rebrii, for example, stresses the value of meaning-based segmentation in interpreter training. He argues that

interpreters should focus on breaking discourse into concepts, not just words or grammar [7]. T. Kyiak takes a similar line, highlighting that cognitive mechanisms – particularly organizing information into coherent units – are essential for both memory and production [6]. These approaches fit well with the chunking model, tying it directly to comprehension and delivery.

The aim of this paper is to examine how chunking benefits pre-service translators during consecutive interpreting.

Discussion. The first significant benefit of chunking is that it eases cognitive load. Working memory is limited; trying to process long, unstructured speech usually means important details slip away. Segmenting speech lets interpreters focus on one manageable piece at a time and devote the right amount of mental energy to each. These are not just random fragments – chunks are made up of units that carry meaning: a logical argument, a thematic idea, or a rhetorical structure. This way, the interpreter builds a clear mental map of the talk, not just a list of words [2].

Chunking also creates reliable memory "anchors." Each chunk becomes a stable block of meaning that can be stored and recalled as a whole [5]. Instead of holding onto separate words or phrases, interpreters remember larger conceptual units – perhaps a cause-and-effect chain or an enumeration. These anchors act as the skeleton for reconstructing the message in the target language [3]. The result is that the interpreter can maintain logical flow and coherence, even under pressure.

Breaking speech into chunks makes it possible to handle longer, more complex messages. Organizing information in this way lightens the memory load and supports better encoding. When the information is chunked, connections between ideas become clearer, so recalling them later gets easier, and the interpreter can capture longer parts of the speech accurately [5]. This is critical in real-life situations, where speakers rarely pause, and interpreters must use specific mechanisms to manage and reproduce the flow of information.

Note-taking goes hand in hand with chunking. Effective notes mirror the chunked structure of the source speech; interpreters scribble down key ideas rather than full sentences. Interpreters often use symbols, abbreviations, and spatial organization on the page to represent relationships between chunks. In a sense, note-taking becomes an outward expression of the internal chunking process, emphasizing that interpreting is about meaning, not just language form.

Given how vital chunking is, it deserves a central spot in interpreter training. Students need to develop the ability to identify meaningful units in real time, prioritize content over form, and structure information logically. This can be achieved through targeted exercises such as segmentation tasks, memory training activities, and guided note-taking practice. By mastering chunking, novice

interpreters can significantly reduce cognitive load and improve overall performance quality.

Conclusions. In conclusion, chunking sits at the heart of consecutive interpreting, both as a cognitive and linguistic strategy. It allows interpreters, especially those in training, to manage their mental resources effectively, create organized mental notes, and retain more of the spoken discourse. By functioning as a system of memory anchors, chunking supports both comprehension and production while interpreting. Therefore, it should be regarded not simply as a useful technique but as a fundamental mechanism underlying successful interpreting practice. Future research could examine how chunking interacts with other mental processes, how it operates across different interpreting modes, and how to integrate it more fully into interpreter training.

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