

The Impact of Pause Distribution, and Duration in Chinese Portuguese Interpretation: An Analysis of Meaning Disruption and Communicative Consequences

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Abstract

This study examines the critical role of pause length and positioning in consecutive and simultaneous interpretation between Chinese and Portuguese. Through empirical analysis of 20 professional interpreters and 40 native Portuguese listeners, we investigated how inappropriate pause distribution within sentence structures disrupts meaning transmission and comprehension. Prosodic features, including pause patterns, are essential to meaning construction in both Chinese and Portuguese. In Chinese, pauses often delineate semantic units and help disambiguate meaning in the absence of explicit grammatical markers (Tseng, 2006). In Portuguese, prosodic phrasing influences syntactic parsing and pragmatic interpretation (Frota & Vigário, 2003). When interpreters introduce pauses that do not align with target language prosodic expectations, listeners may erroneously segment the incoming speech stream, resulting in miscomprehension (Seeber, 2017). This is particularly problematic when interpreting between languages with different prosodic systems, as between Chinese and Portuguese.

Our findings reveal that the typological distance between Chinese (an isolating, tonal language with topic-prominence) and Portuguese (an inflectional, stress-timed language with subject-prominence) creates unique challenges for interpreters. Results indicate that inappropriately positioned pauses occurring at syntactically incorrect junctures result in meaning fragmentation, with a significant negative correlation between inappropriate pause placement and listener comprehension. Passages containing more than five inappropriate pauses per minute showed a bigger reduction in comprehension accuracy. These findings have substantial implications for diplomatic, business, and legal interpretation contexts and provide evidence-based recommendations for interpretation training programs.