

Anticipation in Simultaneous Interpretation

Fred Van Besien

Volume 44, numéro 2, juin 1999

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/004532ar>
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/004532ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal

ISSN

0026-0452 (imprimé)
1492-1421 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Van Besien, F. (1999). Anticipation in Simultaneous Interpretation. *Meta*, 44(2), 250–259. <https://doi.org/10.7202/004532ar>

Résumé de l'article

Dans certains cas, l'interprète énonce un constituant dans la langue cible avant que l'orateur ait produit le constituant correspondant dans la langue source. C'est le résultat d'une formation d'hypothèse sur la signification de l'énonciation de l'orateur avant qu'elle soit achevée. L'article offre une analyse d'un corpus d'interprétation simultanée allemand-français, publié par Lederer (1980, 1981). Les anticipations se révélaient très fréquentes: une anticipation toutes les 85 secondes. Le fait que dans la majorité des cas c'est un verbe qui fut anticipé suggère que l'anticipation est un phénomène spécifiquement lié à certaines langues. Dans le corpus, il y a aussi des cas d'anticipations structurales, une stratégie qui permet à l'interprète de retarder le moment où il/elle doit produire un verbe.

Anticipation in Simultaneous Interpretation

fred van besien

*Hogeschool voor Wetenschap en Kunst,
Brussels, Belgium*

RÉSUMÉ

Dans certains cas, l'interprète énonce un constituant dans la langue cible avant que l'orateur ait produit le constituant correspondant dans la langue source. C'est le résultat d'une formation d'hypothèse sur la signification de l'énonciation de l'orateur avant qu'elle soit achevée.

L'article offre une analyse d'un corpus d'interprétation simultanée allemand-français, publié par Lederer (1980, 1981). Les anticipations se révélaient très fréquentes: une anticipation toutes les 85 secondes. Le fait que dans la majorité des cas c'est un verbe qui fut anticipé suggère que l'anticipation est un phénomène spécifiquement lié à certaines langues. Dans le corpus, il y a aussi des cas d'anticipations structurales, une stratégie qui permet à l'interprète de retarder le moment où il/elle doit produire un verbe.

ABSTRACT

Anticipation refers to the simultaneous interpreter's production of a constituent in the target language before the speaker has uttered the corresponding constituent in the source language. It is the result of hypothesizing on the content of the speaker's utterance before it has been finished.

In this article, existing material consisting of German-French simultaneous interpretation published by Lederer (1980, 1981) has been analyzed. Anticipation was revealed to be a very frequent strategy, occurring every 85 seconds. The fact that so many verbs were anticipated suggests that anticipation is a language-specific phenomenon. The material also contains cases of structural anticipation, a strategy which enables the interpreter to postpone the moment at which s/he has to produce a verb.

INTRODUCTION

Anticipation refers to the simultaneous interpreter's production of a constituent (a word or a group of words) in the target language before the speaker has uttered the corresponding constituent in the source language. This is what happens in example (1), taken from Lederer (1980).

(1) Speaker:

58 laden werden. Ferner beabsichtigen wir
59 dem Verwaltungsrat gelegentlich der Sitzung
60 am 28. März in Basel je einen
61 Prototyp mit jeder der beiden Varianten
62 der Inneneinrichtung vorzuführen.

Interpreter:

59 et nous avons également l'intention
60 le 28 mars à Bâle
61 de présenter les prototypes
62 avec les différents types d'aménagement
63 intérieur, et en outre de ceux des

In measure 61 (the material has been divided in measures of three seconds) the interpreter produces *présenter* (to show) before the corresponding verb *vorzuführen* (to show) is produced by the speaker in measure 62.

Apart from this *pure*, observable kind of anticipation, Lederer (1978) describes another type she considers more common: the interpreter produces a constituent in the target language after the corresponding constituent has been uttered in the source language, “but so soon afterwards and at so correct a place in his own language that there is no doubt the interpreter summoned it before hearing the original” (Lederer 1978: 330). In example (2), taken from Lederer (1981: 252), *zur Verfügung stellen könnte* (could place at our disposal) has been translated by *puisse mettre à notre disposition* within the same measure.

(2) Speaker:

36 ... Des-
37 halb wäre es zu begrüßen wenn die SNCF ei-
38 nen ihrer eigenen Prototypen, mit der Ausstattung Quinet,
39 zur Verfügung stellen könnte
40 so dass am 16. Januar der Presse
41 auch die Variante Quinet gezeigt werden könn-
42 te. Die Schweize-

Interpreter:

37 Il serait particulièrement
38 rement souhaitable que la SNCF
39 puisse mettre à notre disposition un de ses
40 prototypes ayant un aménagement Quinet,
41 de manière à ce que le 16 janvier on puisse également montrer à la presse
42 la variante Quinet.

Lederer (1981: 253) calls this kind of anticipation *freewheeling interpretation*: at the moment that the interpreter has decided on the meaning of the speaker's utterance, s/he listens to the speaker merely as a control, and the translation occurs within a very short delay.

It follows that anticipation should be explained as the result of the combination of a top down strategy (the interpreter hypothesizes on the content of the speaker's utterance before it has been finished) and a bottom up strategy, which serves as a control. An anticipation can be a correct translation of the source constituent, but it can also be only an approximation. In the latter case the bottom up strategy can function as feedback and lead to a repair of the approximation (cf. Flores d'Arcais 1978; Kalina 1991; Kohn & Kalina 1996). Sometimes several approximations for the same source constituent are produced (Kohn & Kalina 1996: 130-131).

For most authors, the information that interpreters use in order to make hypotheses of what speakers intend to say can be of two kinds: linguistic or extralinguistic (cf. Gile 1995; Lederer 1978; Lederer 1981; Seleskovitch 1984; Wills 1978). In the latter case the interpreter uses his/her situational and general knowledge. In the case of linguistic anticipation, the interpreter predicts the appearance of a constituent on the basis of the syntactic and/or semantic information provided by the source language sentence. According to Wills (1978), linguistic anticipation is triggered by certain linguistic units (e.g. words or word combinations) which serve as cues. These cues can be of two types (Wills 1978: 349-350):

1) Co-textual (intralingual) cues, as in example (3), taken from Wills (1978: 349):

(3)

- Speaker: Bei allem, was sonst umstritten ist, meine ich
 Interpreter: In all that
 Speaker: mich also insoweit in sachlicher Übereinstimmung
 Interpreter: has been contested otherwise, I think that
 Speaker: mit der inhaltlichen Auffassung der Fraktion, dieses
 Interpreter: I am along the lines of the
 Speaker: Hohen Hauses zu befinden.
 Interpreter: general opinion of the parliamentary groups in the Bundestag.

In example (3) the word group *meine ich mich* serves as a cue for what follows, not in the least because the final verb (*zu befinden*) is a pallid verb which adds no further information to the sentence.

2) Parts of idiomatic expressions, verb-complement collocations, and standard phrases. In example (4), taken from Wills (1978: 348), the segment *Namens meiner Fraktion darf ich [...] danken* is a standard phrase, frequently used as a debate-opening gambit.

(4)

- Speaker: Namens meiner Fraktion darf ich den beiden Herren
 Interpreter: On behalf of my political
 Speaker: Berichterstatern für die Arbeit, die sie aufgewendet
 Interpreter: group I should like to thank the two
 Speaker: haben, sehr herzlich danken.
 Interpreter: rapporteurs very cordially for their work.

Structural anticipation is a special type of anticipation. It consists of the interpreter's production of an open-ended (Van Dam 1989), simple (Lederer 1984a), neutral (Herbert 1952) sentence, an *open gambit* (Kohn & Kalina 1996) which enables her/him to postpone the moment when the verb must be produced.

Anticipation in simultaneous interpretation is generally considered as a language-specific phenomenon, i.e. it is particularly useful when source language and target language differ in their surface structures. German, for example, is characterized by the embedding of the complement phrase between two elements of the verb phrase (cf. Wills 1978). When interpreting German into English or French there is the problem of the verb which is needed early in the target sentence but produced late in the source language (cf. Lederer 1984b). Setton (1994) mentions parallel problems when interpreting Chinese and Japanese into English or French. Setton adds that the differences between these groups of languages are not limited to the sentence level, but that differences on the level of the discourse also play an important part. Choi (1990) mentions problems due to surface structure differences when interpreting Korean into French.

Anticipation, with its underlying top down and bottom up strategies, is also a feature of *normal* or monolingual language comprehension (cf. Clark & Clark 1977), but it is often claimed that interpreters are better at it (cf. Dillinger 1990; Pöschhacker 1994; see also Van Besien 1997). It follows that anticipation ability is an important goal in the training of interpreters. Special anticipation exercises have been devised by Van Dam (1989) and by Setton (1994).

The study of anticipation in simultaneous interpretation can thus be useful for the training of interpreters. Moreover, it can shed light on the totality of strategies used by interpreters (cf. Flores d'Arcais 1978; Kohn & Kalina 1996), and contribute to process-oriented research into simultaneous interpretation. Although the importance of anticipation is generally acknowledged in the literature (Moser 1978; Le Ny 1978; Herbert 1952; Gile 1995; Chernov 1992; Lederer 1981), it has barely been studied. The first and only systematic research on anticipation — by Mattern — has remained unpublished, although parts of it have been commented on by Wills (1978). Lederer (1980, 1981) offers a qualitative analysis of anticipation and comments on a number of cases but does not go into a quantitative analysis. In fact, Lederer (1981: 253) found only a few cases of anticipation in her material.

MATERIAL

Empirical research on simultaneous interpretation is often handicapped by the difficulty in obtaining professional interpreting data (cf. Kalina 1994: 225). For the purpose of studying anticipation, we can make use of the valuable material collected by Lederer (1980, 1981). It consists of part of a meeting of an international finance group for the acquisition of railway equipment. The total duration is 63 minutes. Most of the discussion, approx. 55 minutes, took place in German. Only one participant, out of six, spoke French. Two professional interpreters translated simultaneously in both directions during the meeting. They alternated with each other so that there was a complete translation of the whole meeting. Afterwards the interpreters were asked to interpret the taped version of those parts they had not translated during the meeting, so that the material consists of two complete versions. Source and target were transcribed and divided in measures of three seconds each.

The material used for this study on anticipation consists of the two complete French translations of approx. 55 minutes of German spontaneous discussion, transcribed and divided in measures of three seconds by Lederer (1980).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The total number of anticipations in the material is 78. On a corpus of two times approx. 55 minutes this means one anticipation every 85 seconds. The total number of anticipations is much larger than expected on the basis of Lederer's analysis.

The division of these anticipations over both interpreters is as follows: the first interpreter anticipated 31 times; the second one 47 times. The difference between the number of anticipations per interpreter is not significant ($X^2 = 3.28$). This strongly suggests that anticipation should be considered as a general strategy used by interpreters, and not as a characteristic of individual interpreting style.

An analysis of all anticipations according to type of constituent that was anticipated shows that in 60 out of 78 cases this was a verb constituent (cf. table 1).

Table 1: Anticipations according to constituent and per interpreter

anticipated constituent	interpreter 1	interpreter 2	total
verb	24	36	60
adverb phrase	1	2	3
noun phrase	1	5	6
conjunction	0	1	1
pronoun	0	2	2
structural anticipation	5	1	6
total	31	47	78

The fact that so many verbs were anticipated is evidence for the viewpoint that anticipation is language-specific: German and French differ in their surface structures and the position of the verb (early in French, late in German) is one of the main differences.

Of the 72 non-structural anticipations, 61 can be considered as *pure*, observable anticipations, in that they precede the source language constituent with at least one measure of three seconds (example 5), or they fall within the same measure but still clearly precede the corresponding source language constituent because they come at the beginning of that measure while the source constituent comes at the end of it (example 6):

(5) Speaker:

73 ähnlich sind. Die Deutsche Bundes-
 74 bahn, die italienischen Bahnen, die
 75 ÖBB und die SBB haben sich
 76 im Prinzip einverstanden erklärt.

Interpreter:

73 une voiture sem-, analogue. La Bundesbahn,
 74 les Chemins de fer Italiens, la ÖBB et la S
 75 BB ont accepté heu le
 76 principe de la mise à la disposition de la SNCF de ce jeu
 77 de dessins. La D heu B

(6) Speaker:

110 und de Dietrich übergibt. Diese beiden
 111 Firmen müssten sich verpflichten, den Inhalt
 112 der Zeichnungen vertraulich zu behandeln
 113 und die Zeichnungen nur zum Bau von
 114 Personenwagen für die SNCF zu verwenden.

Interpreter:

112 ces firmes-là devant s'engager
 113 à traiter ces dessins comme des documents confi-
 114 dentiels et à ne les utiliser que pour la construction de voitures de
 115 voyageurs pour la SNCF.

In example (5) the French translation *accepté* (accepted) is produced at least three seconds before the source language constituent *einverstanden erklärt* (agreed). In example (6) both *utiliser* (to use) and *verwenden* (*idem*) are produced in measure

114, but the French translation is produced earlier than the corresponding source language verb.

The material contains eight cases, all of them verbs, where source and target are being produced at the same time (see example 7):

(7) Speaker:

66 nen der UIC vorgeführt werden. Ich darf

67 noch eine zweite Sache hier vorbringen.

Interpreter:

67 de l'UIC. Je tiens à vous faire savoir

68 une autre chose encore, récemment nous avons fait connaî-

These cases can be considered as anticipations during *freewheeling interpretation* as described by Lederer (1981). They are less common than the observable anticipations.

On a total of 78 anticipations 49 are correct, i.e. they are correct translations of the source constituent that follows. In the remaining 29 cases an approximation is given. The number of correct translations is significantly higher than the number of approximations ($X^2 = 5.13$; $p < .025$). In four cases the approximation was repaired after hearing the source constituent (example 8).

(8) Speaker:

0 Herr Präsident, meine Herren,

1 das von der Gruppe Guignard auf-

2 gestellte Versuchsprogramm für die zehn Prototypen

3 ist in der Sitzung des Gemischten TEE-

4 Ausschusses am 29. November

5 endgültig genehmigt und zur Ausführung freigegeben

6 worden.

Interpreter:

1 Monsieur de Président, Messieurs,

2 le programme d'essais

3 élaboré par le groupe Guignard pour les dix

4 prototypes a été étudié le vingt-

5 neuf novembre au grou-

6 pe TEE, il a été adopté;

The German verb *genehmigt* (adopted) in measure 5 is translated as *étudié* (studied) in measure 4, which is an approximation; it is repaired in measure 6 as *adopté*, which is a correct translation.

Example (9) is one of the two cases in which approximations involving several steps were found.

(9) Speaker:

6 ... Die geschätzten Kosten

7 für das Versuchsprogramm

8 waren uns auf Grund eines Irrtums zu nie-

9 drig angegeben worden, daher darf ich Sie bitten

10 in der Note, die wir Ihnen übersandt haben die Zahl

11 1 komma 2 auf 1 komma 4 Millionen Schweizer

12 Franken zu erhöhen für dieses Versuchsprogramm.

Interpreter:

- 7 Les frais qui ont été évalués pour
- 8 heu la réalisation de ce programme d'essai
- 9 ont été indiqués à un niveau trop bas,
- 10 c'est une erreur et je vous demanderai de bien vouloir modifier la note
- 11 que nous avons transmise et heu d'ins-
- 12 crire 1 virgule 4 million de francs suisses au lieu de 1 vir-
- 13 gule 2 million que vous y trouvez pour le programme d'essai.

The German verb *erhöhen* (to increase) in measure 12 is anticipated by *modifier* (to modify) in measure 10, which is an approximation; there is a new anticipation in measure 11-12, namely *inscrire* (to fill in), which is also an approximation. There is no repair.

As has already been mentioned, the material also contains six cases of structural anticipation. The great difference between the two interpreters as to their frequency in using this strategy (five as opposed to one) suggests that structural anticipation is not a general strategy but reflects individual differences in interpreting style.

Structural anticipation is a way to anticipate a constituent, in most cases a verb, with syntactic means: the interpreter produces a structure that allows him/her to postpone the moment at which s/he has to produce the verb (i.e. until the source verb has been produced, or until the context has clarified the meaning).

Two kinds of structural anticipation could be found in the material. The first one simply consists in changing the order of the constituents, as in example (10):

(10) Speaker:

- Herr Präsident, meine Herren.
- 1 Ich kann die von Herrn L. gewünschte
 - 2 Erklärung heu gerne abgeben.

Interpreter:

- 1 Monsieur le Président, Messieurs,
- 2 ... la déclaration que Monsieur L.
- 3 me demande, je suis tout à fait prêt
- 4 à la faire. Nous avons

The translation of *abgeben* (to give) is postponed by first translating the direct object (*la déclaration que Monsieur L. me demande*). By then (measure 3), the source verb has been produced and it can be translated.

The second kind of structural anticipation consists in inserting a phrase such as *s'il s'avère que* (if it turns out that), *on devra constater que* (we will have to establish that), *de faire en sorte que* (to act in such a way that), *de prévoir* (to foresee). In example (11) the verb *abgeschwächt*

(11) Speaker:

- 116 men. Ich möchte aber doch sagen
- 117 und die Wortmeldung von Herrn Dr. K. hat mir
- 118 das bereits unterstrichen
- 119 wenn also nun weiterhin noch
- 120 mehrere Verwaltungen nun aus
- 121 diesem ursprünglichen Kon-, von diesem ursprünglichen
- 122 Konzept abweichen, dann ist doch eigent-
- 123 lich unsere unsere grosse Anstrengung,
- 124 die wir mit diesen Wagen gemacht haben

- 125 heu beinah, wie soll ich sagen, doch etwas
 126 abgeschwächt. Ich heu

Interpreter:

- 118 Je dois cependant ajouter, et ce qu'a dit Monsieur K.
 119 me renferme, me renforce dans cette optique
 120 je dois ajouter que heu si plusieurs
 121 autres administrations encore
 122 heu s'écartaient de la conception
 123 qui fut initialement la nôtre,
 124 et bien à ce moment là, on devra heu constater de, que
 125 que le gros effort que nous avons accompli pour
 126 l'achat collectif d'un seul type heu de
 127 voiture heu risque d'être très
 128 heu fortement heu
 129 compromis. Je ne vois pas de solution,

Abgeschwächt (decreased) should normally be translated in measure 126. The insertion of the phrase *on devra constater que* postpones the translation until measure 129.

Finally, there is the question concerning the kind of information used by the interpreter to make hypotheses of what is going to follow. This question is very difficult to answer: in almost every case situational and general knowledge plays an important part (as does knowledge obtained during the course of translation), so that it is almost impossible to distinguish between extralinguistic and linguistic information. Context played a role in only three cases in the corpus. Example (12) is one of them:

(12) Speaker:

- 10 heu ich schlage vor, dass wir dann jetzt, so wie
 11 Herr G. es eben angeregt hat, in die Diskussion
 12 der Frage der Pressevorführung der Prototypen
 13 übergehen, und ich erteile,

Interpreter:

- 10 Et bien nous allons
 11 maintenant faire ce qu'a demandé Monsieur
 12 G., à savoir que nous allons discuter de la présentation
 13 à la presse de ce groupe de prototypes.

The German substantive *der Frage* can be considered to serve as a cue for *übergehen* (to turn to the question). The fact that this cue is not that strong follows from the approximation given by the interpreter, nl. *discuter*.

CONCLUSIONS

Anticipation can be considered as an important strategy in simultaneous interpretation. In Lederer's material each of the two interpreters anticipated on average once every 85 seconds. The frequency is much higher than Lederer (1980, 1981) expected. In most cases a verb was anticipated. This suggests that anticipation is a language-specific phenomenon since the position of the verb is one of the main surface differences between German and French. Empirical research into anticipation and language pairs with parallel surface structures could lead to more certainty.

Most anticipations are *pure*, observable cases. Only occasionally do source and target occur at the same time. Repairs are not frequent. It follows that when anticipating, top down strategies prevail over bottom up strategies.

Whereas *pure* anticipation seems to be a general strategy, some interpreters seem to use structural anticipation by producing certain syntactic structures that have the effect of postponing the production of the target verb.

Extralinguistic information like general and situational knowledge, and information obtained in the course of translation, seems to play the most important part in the interpreter's hypothesizing of the speaker's utterances. Purely linguistic knowledge plays only a minor part.

REFERENCES

- Chernov, G.V. (1992): "Conference Interpretation in the USSR: History, Theory, New Frontiers", *Meta*, 37 (1), pp. 149-162.
- Choi, J.W. (1990): "Spécificités de la langue coréenne et interprétation", in M. Lederer (Ed.), *Études traductologiques*, Paris, Minard, pp. 101-115.
- Clark, H.H. & E.V. Clark (1977): *Psychology and Language. An Introduction to Psycholinguistics*, New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Dillinger, M. (1990): "Comprehension During Interpreting: What Do Interpreters Know that Bilinguals Don't?", *The Interpreters' Newsletter*, 3, pp. 41-58.
- Flores d'Arcais, G.B. (1978): "The Contribution of Cognitive Psychology to the Study of Interpretation", in D. Gerver and H.W. Sinaiko (Eds.), *Language Interpretation and Communication*, New York/London, Plenum Press, pp. 385-402.
- Gile, D. (1995): *Basic Concepts and Models for Interpreter and Translator Training*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins.
- Herbert, J. (1952): *The Interpreter's Handbook: How to Become a Conference Interpreter*, Geneva, Georg.
- Kalina, S. (1991): "Zur Rolle der Theorie in der Dolmetscherausbildung", *Textcontext*, 6 (1), pp. 101-113.
- (1994): "Analyzing Interpreters' Performance: Methods and Problems", in C. Dollerup and A. Lindegaard (Eds.), *Teaching Translation and Interpreting 2*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, J. Benjamins, pp. 225-232.
- Kohn, K. and S. Kalina (1996): "The Strategic Dimension of Interpreting", *Meta*, 41 (1), pp. 118-138.
- Lederer, M. (1978): "Simultaneous Interpretation: Units of Meaning and Other Features", in D. Gerver and H.W. Sinaiko (Eds.), *Language Interpretation and Communication*, New York/London, Plenum Press, pp. 323-333.
- (1980): *La traduction simultanée. Fondements théoriques*, Université de Lille III.
- (1981): *La traduction simultanée. Expérience et théorie*, Paris, Minard.
- (1984a): "La pédagogie de la traduction simultanée", in D. Seleskovitch and M. Lederer (Eds.), *Interpréter pour traduire*, Paris, Didier, pp. 199-228.
- (1984b): "La traduction simultanée", in D. Seleskovitch and M. Lederer (Eds.), *Interpréter pour traduire*, Paris, Didier, pp. 136-162.
- Le Ny, J.-F. (1978): "Psychosemantics and Simultaneous Interpretation", in D. Gerver and H.W. Sinaiko (Eds.), *Language Interpretation and Communication*, New York/London, Plenum Press, pp. 289-298.
- Moser, B. (1978): "Simultaneous Interpretation: a Hypothetical Model and its Practical Application", in D. Gerver and H.W. Sinaiko (Eds.), *Language Interpretation and Communication*, New York/London, Plenum Press, pp. 353-368.
- Pöchhacker, F. (1994): *Simultandolmetschen als komplexes Handeln*, Tübingen, Gunter Narr.

- Seleskovitch, D. (1984): "Les anticipations dans la compréhension", in D. Seleskovitch and M. Lederer (Eds.), *Interpréter pour traduire*, Paris, Didier, pp. 273-283.
- Setton, R. (1994): "Experiments in the Application of Discourse Studies to Interpreter Training", in C. Dollerup and A. Lindegaard (Eds.), *Teaching Translation and Interpreting 2*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins, pp. 183-198.
- Van Besien, F. (1997): "Simultaneous Interpretation: a Survey of Research Results", *Interface. Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 11 (2), pp. 117-129.
- Van Dam, I.M. (1989): "Strategies of Simultaneous Interpretation", in L. Gran and J. Dodds (Eds.), *The Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Teaching Conference Interpretation*, Udine, Campanotto, pp. 167-176.
- Wilss, W. (1978): "Syntactic Anticipation in German-English Simultaneous Interpretation, in D. Gerver and H.W. Sinaiko (Eds.), *Language Interpretation and Communication*, New York/London, Plenum Press, pp. 343-352.