Snapshots of waveforms in multitrack digital recordings: a help for the assessment of simultaneous interpreters

• End of the 90’s: the start of digital recordings.
• Before: assessment systems were based on recordings made by cassette recorders, inside booths or in labs.
• In labs: original+interpretation in the same track.

Did not offer the visual feedback of the ones today.
The field of assessment in interpreter training

- In the 90’s: for the selection of candidates.
- Some urgent issues to be addressed: under researched.
- Definition of SI: deliver in real time: difficult to assess.
- How do we do it?: TV+classroom: with two pairs of headphones: give feedback and improvement: very demanding.
Assessment: Present and past

- In the 80’s with the influence of language teaching this approach was questioned.
- Assessment: an integral part of the training process. Making a judgement about the students learning in order to identify their strength and weaknesses in order to improve.
- Campbell and Hale (2003: 221): “Interpreting was still in its infancy and the new kid on the block could benefit from the solid source of knowledge available in the field of research”.

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Wrong assessments in interpreting

・ Translation: BUT interpreting quality includes aspects that cannot be explained by simply comparing the source and target language.
・ Riccardi (2002: 116): “Interpreting is something evanescent”.
・ Why?: Assessing a performance of simultaneous interpreting is more complicated than it seems. Very complex mental activity. Therefore sometimes made in a holistic and subjective manner.
・ Rely on the professional experience of the teaching staff: subjective and intuitive. It is much more complex than measuring body weight.
How to do a proper assessment

• Daniel Gile (1995b: 151): the fidelity of the speech, the quality of output, quality of the voice, the prosodic characteristics, the terminology.

• Scarcity of assessment criterias: Institute of Linguists has one but general and not for conference interpreting.
With users

• With interpreting users: Kurz (from 1989 until 2001). Results depend on age, gender, experience with interpreting, etc.
• Bühler: accent, voice, fluency, logical cohesion, sense consistency, completeness, grammar, terminology and style.
• Value? Questioned by Kalina (2005: 776)
• Conference interpreters have higher expectations than users.
The prosodic characteristics of the delivery

• An experiment: five students recorded
• Assessment:
  1. Waves: reading + predictions.
  2. Audio was compared.
Waveforms

• In the past: 1996 to check time-lag by Maria Durham+Suprasegmentals of SI by József Bendik, 1996.
• What do we see? Pauses: information missing. Volume: bad control of voice.
• Important: Bühler: voice and fluency.
• Mac: motu and audiodesk 2.0461
Listening to the audio

• Predictions were right
• The waves support audio recordings.
Furthermore

For self assessment: students watch the waveforms that they produce while they interpret.

Requires split attention therefore for advanced stages since it is very demanding.