

Simultaneous interpretation as a cooperative language context

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Abstract

How is language management accomplished during simultaneous interpretation? One possibility is that interpretation represents a cooperative language context during which both languages are maintained active and inhibitory control is reduced. To examine whether experience with interpretation leads to reduced inhibitory control, four groups of students with varying interpretation experience were assessed using a three language switching paradigm. The results suggest that interpretation experiences did not alter inhibitory control use. Instead inhibitory control in the L1 may be affected by the predominant interactional context and in the L2 by language proficiency.

Background

Language Contexts:

Green and Abutalebi (2013) draws a distinction between competitive and cooperative language contexts

- ❖ Competitive contexts: large demands placed on interference control, supported largely by inhibitory processes
- ❖ Cooperative contexts: demands on interference control neutral, marked by less inhibition of languages

Simultaneous Interpretation (SI):

- ❖ Simultaneous interpretation requires an individual to attend to a stream of oral material in one language and with a few seconds delay produce the same content in another language
- ❖ Some evidence suggests that interpreters maintain both languages active (Babcock & Vallesi, submitted; Ibáñez et al., 2010)

Present Study:

We examined whether experience with simultaneous interpretation affects the amount of inhibition applied to abandoned languages. Students with varying SI experience were assessed on a three language switching paradigm. The n-2 repetition cost was employed to quantify inhibition.

Methods

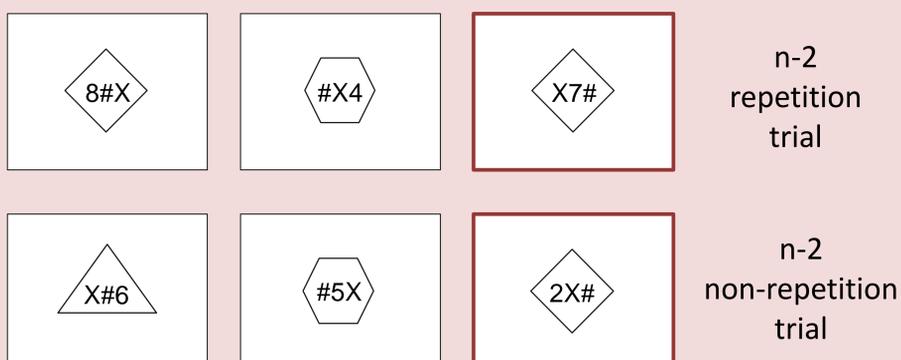
Participants:

70 Italian university students studying languages or conference interpreting

4 groups based on \pm SI training and \pm recent SI practice

Three language switching paradigm:

- Name aloud the digit in L1, L2, or L3
- Language indicated by a graphic cue (e.g., diamond \rightarrow L1)

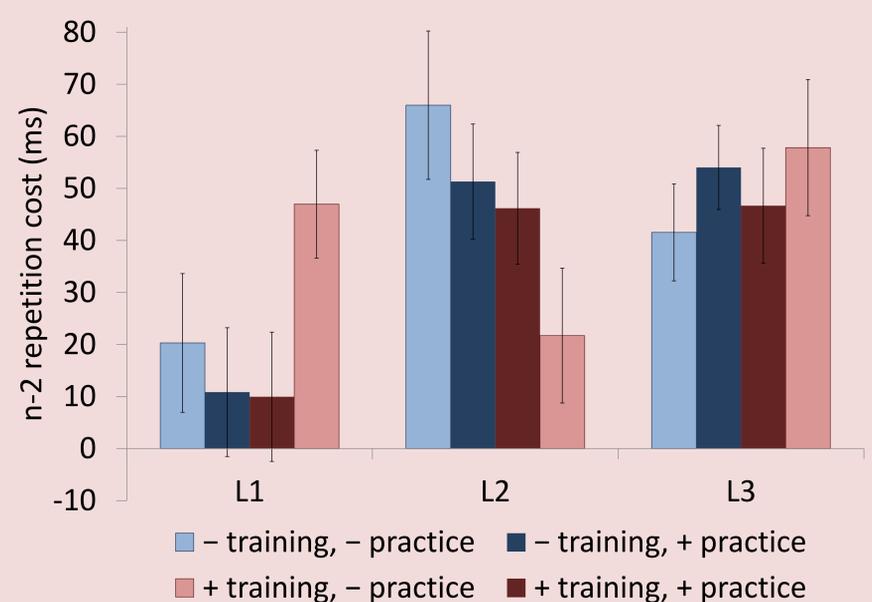


- n-2 repetition trials require a return to a recently inhibited language and therefore show a decrement in performance
- Inhibition measured by difference between trial types:
n-2 repetition cost = n-2 repetition trials – n-2 non-repetition trials

Mayr & Keele, 2000

Results

The size of the n-2 repetition cost was influenced by the interaction of language and group ($p = .007$)



- patterns of n-2 repetition costs not explained by the training or practice factors
- n-2 repetition cost in L2 negatively correlated with self-rated L2 ability in speaking and understanding ($r = -.237, p = .053$ and $r = -.316, p = .009$) across groups
- the '+ training, - practice' group (■) were the only students not actively engaged in school life, where code-switching occurred most frequently

Conclusions

- ❖ The level of inhibitory control used in language management is dependent on various language and language use characteristics
- ❖ Language context may influence the inhibitory control applied to L1
 - ❖ The three groups actively engaged in school life, which likely represents a cooperative language context, displayed low inhibition of the L1
 - ❖ The group which likely spent more time in competitive language contexts evidenced greater inhibition of the L1
- ❖ Inhibitory control applied to L2 may be affected by L2 proficiency
- ❖ The n-2 repetition cost provides a pure measure of inhibition to use in the investigation of language management processes

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