

Challenges Faced by Non-Professional Interpreters in Interpreting Church Sermons in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to identify the challenges faced by non-professional church interpreters in church interpreting in Malaysia and explore the solutions to resolve those challenges. Using a qualitative approach, six church interpreters were interviewed and observed using an adapted semi-structured interview and an observation checklist. Data analysis revealed that grammatical issues such as SVO reconstruction and tense ambiguity were the most prominent challenge faced, followed by culture-specific items and limited working memory. Interview responses elucidated one main solution employed by church interpreters, which permeates across different domains of challenges as an applicable one-for-all solution, i.e., practice. Moreover, it was concluded that church interpreters are widely non-professionals and essential to the congruent rendering of the sermons in both languages, therefore, they deserve the recognition as an established body of Interpreting studies. Future research could look into prospects of “natural interpreters” and demographics-exclusive qualitative benchmarks for non-professional church interpreting.

Keywords: challenges; sermon; church interpreting; Malaysia; non-professionals

INTRODUCTION

Interpretation has been an important element in gaining widespread conversion from the multicultural community. Malay Bible translations date back as early as the 16th century when European colonialism and Protestants began their expansion and development. Netherlands was one of the first European countries with Protestantism to colonize Southeast Asia. As a result of the Dutch colonization in the Indonesian archipelago, where Malay was the common language for trade, it was then when initiatives for the Malay translation of the Bible began. British increasing involvement in the 19th century paved the way for Christianity to spread in English as the British built schools and churches across many regions in West Malaysia. During this time, many Chinese and Indians converted and began their missionary activities in their own mother tongue.

Malaysia is a multicultural nation and multiple languages are used in church settings formally or informally. According to a study conducted on the languages used in places of worship in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, some churches have English as a common language of use and several other languages such as Chinese, Malay, Tamil and others. Hence, where there is a need for appeal to Christianity among the non-English speakers, there is a need for interpretation and translation (James, Tan, & Amini, 2018).

It is a common practice for sermon delivery in West Malaysian Christian spiritual convocations and church services to be in multiple languages, primarily English and Chinese. While church interpreting is widely conducted in different modes such as sign language interpreting, simultaneous interpreting and consecutive interpreting. Consecutive interpreting is practiced in most churches that have interpretation, where the interpreter speaks after the speaker finishes a sentence and pauses for the interpreter. Typically, the interpreter will either stand beside the speaker at the pulpit, or seated in a remote interpreting room. In some churches, professionals in interpreting may not be scarce, especially mega churches where they are extremely resourceful. Consequently, those interpreters should be able, in theory, to produce excellent results appealing to the audience who do not understand the speaker's language. Such interpreters would presumably be able to relay the content of the speaker's message in a professional and accurate fashion.

Malaysian church interpreters began undergoing "on-the-job" training as young as fourteen or fifteen years old in smaller-scale worship sessions. Novice interpreters face challenges such as incompetency of the language, stuttering, or lack of knowledge on specific jargon/register. Language incompetence is the inability that is associated with the speaker of a language to speak fluently, listening to the said language and understanding. Beginner interpreters who are barely proficient in the source language and target language may not have adequate mastery over grammatical and communicative competence. As a result, he/she may not be able to deliver the message in the target language as was intended in the source language in a comprehensive and faithful manner.

Despite being an important part of Christianity in Malaysia, church interpreting has not received as much attention in academia as compared to religious translation; furthermore, research into non-professional church interpreting remains relatively scant. Many church interpreters are untrained individuals or novices with little to no experience, the current church interpreting scene is dire. This would result in significant negative implications on the listeners of the interpretation. For example, listeners who only understand the interpreted language have a huge window for misunderstanding and misconception of the very basics of Christian faith.

While the practice of church interpreting is rather common in churches worldwide (Du Plessis, 2017), there should be professionals/experts in church interpreting who could render the message more accurately. However, church interpreting is typically performed by non-professional interpreters. Hild (2015) defines non-professional interpreters as untrained individuals of the community who are bilingual or multilingual and learn interpreting "on-the-job". In most churches in Malaysia where the congregation may range between ten people to two thousand and five hundred people (megachurch) per church (NECF Malaysia, 2001), members of the church community who are barely proficient in both languages will need to be scheduled for regular interpreting sessions, typically on a weekly basis. Megachurches might have the resources to conduct non-professional trainings for their beginner interpreters. However, this would pose a huge problem to churches of smaller sizes where resources are inadequate.

From another perspective, the ordinary people do not seem to deem interpreting as a profession (Du Plessis, 2017). In this context, interpreting is often misconceived as a simple task that can be performed by individuals who have a considerable command of two or more languages or knowledge in the field. Church interpreters are perceived as visible co-constructors of meaning in theological discourse and regulate their behaviour and performance to be in line with the sermon speaker (Hild, 2017).

The present study aims to identify the challenges faced by non-professional church interpreters in Malaysia and explore the solutions used by non-professional interpreters to resolve the challenges faced in church interpreting in Malaysia. Consecutive interpreting is the only mode of interpreting practiced in the True Jesus Church (TJC), therefore only consecutive interpreting is looked into. Hence, this research aims to identify the challenges and offer solutions for church interpreting by answering the following research questions:

- 1) What are the challenges face by non-professional church interpreters in Malaysian context?
- 2) What are the solutions as coping strategies based on the non-professional church interpreters' perspectives in Malaysian context?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Church interpreting

The latter half of the twentieth century has seen an unprecedented development of the discipline of Translatology in the West (Cheung, 2013) after notable contributions, broadly described as “philosophical theories of translation” were proposed by the likes of Ezra Pound, Walter Benjamin, Eugene Nida, etc. In the East however, notable research and interpreting activities are mainly done in Japan and China (Komatsu, 2003). According to Ibrahim (2007) and Amini, Ibrahim- González, Ayob, and Amini (2015) research into the profession of interpreting is relatively scant in smaller countries like Malaysia.

Church interpreting is any translational activity enabling immediate inter-lingual and intercultural communication in church settings. As of today there is a scarcity of research conducted on church interpreting, despite the increasing proportions of non-professional interpreting and translation across multiple domains and communities.

While novice is someone with little or no experience in a particular domain (Moser-Mercer, 1997), non-professional interpreters-individuals with a certain degree of bilingual competence who perform interpreting tasks on an ad hoc basis without economic compensation or prior specific training (Martínez-Gómez, 2015). Since the advent of Translation and Interpreting Studies, the discipline is generally reckoned to be largely pertinent to professional translation exclusively. Meanwhile, non-professional interpreting and translation (NPIT) remains to be a relatively uncharted territory, despite its unprecedented spread in recent years in light of the mass immigration. Research in church interpreting has not received much attention despite being a common practice in churches worldwide (Hild, 2017). Studies pertinent to the Malaysian setting on church interpreting is virtually non-existent. IRS (Interpreting in Religious Setting) is a type of interpreting that is one of the earliest to be documented among other types of interpreting. Nonetheless, the dearth of research in church interpreting could be attributed to the stigmatization

of non-professional interpreting/translation and professionalization agendas of Translation and Interpretation Studies discipline, which sets professionals as the norm-setting, prototypical form. However, a growing number of studies in the past decade has shown that NPIT has played important roles in facilitating economy, commercial, cultural and religious exchanges in the past and continues to grow at an unprecedented rate in the present; contributing to the emergence of new forms of civic engagement in public life, reconfiguration of the publishing and media marketplaces, and the consolidation of new paradigms of linguistic, cultural, and religious mediation in new sites of cross-cultural contact (Hild,2017).

Non-professional interpreting, in contrast to professional interpreting, refers to interpreters who have not received formal training in the field or any years of experience at his/her disposal. As Hild (2017) mentioned that non-professionals are being stigmatized, yet the present proportions of NPIT in the communities worldwide prove to be growing quickly and is in need of research.

Challenges of Religious Interpreting

Challenges are the difficulties and problems that translators and interpreters face during their course of action (Yap, Adeela Abu Bakar, Amini, & Rafik-Galea, 2018). Church interpreting is typically performed by non-professional interpreters (Hokkanen, 2012). Without receiving formal training, most interpreters pick up the many aspects of the skill of interpreting on-the-job (Hild, 2015). By doing so, it would be much more difficult for the average church interpreters to meet the expectation of the desired outcome. Not only are they formally untrained in the discourse of domain knowledge and profession of interpreting, they are unfamiliar with the strategies employed by experienced interpreters in handling the task and producing a desirable outcome.

Barbara Moser-Mercer (1997) conducted an interdisciplinary project to break down the interpreting process based on researched theoretical models and identify the differences between expert and novice interpreters. The results showed that experts displayed better factual, schematic and semantic knowledge, and employed comprehension, planning, monitoring and management strategies. Besides that, one main difference between experts and novices was the level of automation. When experts' performance becomes unconscious and automated, they are able to use their available cognitive processing capacity optimally, bypassing the basic processing limitations (Wong, Tan, & Amini, 2019). Moser-Mercer found that experts gained automation and unconscious employment of strategies after an extended period of drilling.

Kurz (2003) found that there was no correlation between stress levels and performance factors, an indication that highly competent interpreters or workers who are motivated are able to perform and maintain a high level of performance. Besides, one difference between experts and novices with regards to coping with stress was that experts had more cognitive processing capacity when they automated some basic processing; meanwhile novices unanimously agreed to the primary challenge at their stage of expertise, concentration of multitasking and handling all the subskills of the task without neglecting any of them. The results of Kurz' study reflects on church interpreting where experienced church interpreters who face high levels of stress while interpreting may have unknowingly employed some coping strategies.

Hence Moser-Mercer's framework of the strategies employed by professional interpreters would serve useful in the adaptation of a framework to measure the expertise of non-professional interpreting and strategies they employ.

One of the studies on the challenges on church interpreting is by Biamah (2013) who identified the challenges faced during sermon interpretations and strategies made by the speakers and interpreters to overcome them. Aside from participant observation and tape-recording strategies that were used for data collection, ten churches were randomly sampled and six church members, one preacher and one interpreter among the 10 churches were selected to respond to the research questionnaires and interviews. The descriptive study revealed that some of the problems include the linguistic competence of the speaker, interpreter and the audience, the pace of the speech delivered by the speaker, and an overly literal/word-for-word translation is utilized. The findings of this study showed that the speaker or the audience would correct the interpreter for his mistakes occasionally. This strikes a chord with the situation of church interpreting in Malaysia where some of the speakers and listeners who speak both languages may correct the interpreter for wrong interpretations. Biamah suggested that interpreters would perform better if they had a higher competence of both languages and incorporating formal interpretational trainings for the benefit of the target language audience.

Musyoko and Karanja (2014) looked into the problems faced by interpreters of the Pentecostal Church in interpreting church sermons from English to Kamba. Ten audio-taped recordings of sermons from five interpreters were obtained from different Pentecostal churches. 10 other informants who understand both languages and the 5 interpreters were interviewed on the quality and accuracy of the interpretation and provide feedback. The findings showed that some of the problems came from speaker such as lengthy utterances, technical terminologies, overlapping, elicitation of responses and speed of delivery. Some other problems came from the interpreter themselves such as academic level, professional qualification and exposure to religious discourse. It is important to note that none of these interpreters are professionals; they were all non-professional volunteers.

Thembhani (2016) identified the problems revolving around the interpretation of church sermons in Vatsonga Charismatic churches. The researcher used participant observation and interview techniques for data collection. The informants included 10 interpreters and 5 preachers from a total of five churches (two interpreters and one preacher from each church) who were purposively sampled to be interviewed. Ten sermons (five from each church) were transcribed word-for-word for text analysis. The findings showed that the problems stemmed from the linguistic competence and professionalism of the interpreter, the pace of the preacher, abandonment of messages, and skipping. As a result, the interpretation was ineffective for the most part and therefore barely achieved the purpose of church interpreting.

Da Silva, Soares, and Dias (2018) explored simultaneous interpretation in a church in Brazil. Three religious interpreters and two students who had completed a course on fundamentals of interpreting but had no domain knowledge of professional experience. Results showed that interpreters' performance with domain knowledge proved to be more impactful. The results reflect the importance of domain knowledge in the context of this paper, where beginner interpreters have to familiarize themselves with religious discourse. Experienced interpreters in church interpreting who have their skills honed over the years are experts in their own domain, and they tend to be creative in the way they interpret to the target audience in a way that is more intelligible or interesting because they are part of the audience themselves (Pérez-González & Susam-Saraeva, 2012). The literature has offered some insights on the challenges and difficulties of non-professional church interpreters.

METHOD

This study merits a qualitative approach due to the fact that research in the area of church interpreting is relatively scant at the time of this study. As such, qualitative research would prove useful when a subject is relatively unexplored and little is understood about it (Creswell, 2009; Yap, & Amini, 2020).

Purposive sampling was used to select the informants. Six non-professional interpreters were selected from Christian sect/denomination in West Malaysian True Jesus Church. In this study, the interpreters were interpreting church sermons. There are three main regions that primarily use English and Chinese, namely central region (Kuala Lumpur and Selangor), northern region (Perak to Penang), and southern region (Negeri Sembilan to Johore).

Two informants from each region were selected. All informants were non-professionals interpreters. Ad-hoc interpreters were not included in this study. The criterion for the selection of interpreters by experience is three years and above of experience in church interpreting. Interpreters were selected based on their active involvement in church interpreting. For the purpose of this study, active involvement in church interpreting was defined as interpreting at church sessions on a weekly basis or a bare minimum of one session a month to merit the status of active interpreter.

The instruments used in this study include interviews and participant observation. Audio recordings of the interpreting sessions were analysed and triangulated with participation observation. An observation checklist and a set of interview questions were adapted from the Du Plessis (2017) to correspond with the informants' challenges in church interpreting. The checklist and interview questions were moderated by two interpreting scholars in terms of content validity.

Six live interpreting sessions were audio recorded and participant observations were conducted in six weeks. Each session was around two hours. It was attempted to control factors that could possibly effect the observation, such as presence of physical interference, and noise. Each participant was interviewed after observation of the live interpreting session with a semi-structured interview. The data was analysed, challenges were identified and thematically classified from the informants' interview responses, cross-referred with challenges observed in the actual interpreting sessions. Solutions were explored from the analysis of the challenges discussed in the informants' interviews.

FINDINGS

Profile of Informants

The six informants were active interpreters in the True Jesus Church. The description of demographics consists of age, gender, education level, years of experience in church interpreting, first/second language and career (Table 1).

TABLE 1. *Informants' profile*

Participant	Age	Gender	Education level	Years of experience	First/second language	Career
Jeremy	25	Male	MD	8	A) Chinese B) English	Houseman

Lana	25	Female	BA Literature	English	7	A) Chinese B) English	Tutor
Emma	53	Female	PhD Economics		30	A) English B) Malay C) Chinese	Researcher at MCCY
Sarah	24	Female	ACCA		9	A) English B) Chinese	Accountant
Michelle	41	Female	BA Language MA Linguistics	English Applied	31	A) Chinese B) Malay C) English	University lecturer
Stephanie	24	Female	Undergraduate Biomedical Science		6	A) English B) Chinese	-

Answer to Research Question 1

This section outlines the main challenges faced by non-professional church interpreters in Malaysia. The main challenges consisted of grammar, not having internalized/intuitive grammar, non-standard first language input, current education paradigm of language teaching, lack of self-knowledge, metalinguistic awareness, and sensitivity to language, nature of voluntary interpreting work in church, Manglish culture, culture-specific items, religious terms, biblical terms, theological terms, Christianese, idiomatic expressions, and cultural expressions, puns, and limited working memory.

Grammar

Grammar was found as the most challenging aspect of church interpreting. In the professional community of interpreting, grammatical competence is heralded (Kurz, 2001). all the more so that proficiency in language is a basic requirement for interpreting and translation; and grammar is one of the aspects that dictates the basic proficiency of a language, spoken or written. However, grammatical incompetence was pointed out by all the informants in the interview as a challenge that they faced in the past or are still currently facing. One of the most prominent class of grammar that poses a challenge is the subject-verb-object (SVO) structure.

Jeremy pointed out in detail the challenges faced in terms of SVO structure. The SVO structure in simple sentences in English and Chinese are the same, for example in the case of ‘他喜欢跑步’ and ‘he likes running’, both begins with a subject followed by a verb and object. However, when more complements are added to form a complex sentence, the structure will be different in both languages.

In the example provided by Jeremy, entire sentence in Chinese can roughly be sectionalized into 5 parts. The example below depicts the backtranslation with the original SVO structure in Chinese. The SVO structure provided by Jeremy as a translation shows the difference in SVO structure with the original sentence.

由于神的时间还没有到	以色列人	在出埃及以前	在法老的逼迫下	痛苦的当了四百年	的奴隶
Because time has not been up	God's The Israelites	Before leaving Egypt	Under the oppression of Pharaoh	Served as slaves for 400 years	

Each phrase in the example above has its sequence independently altered. For example, ‘在出埃及以前’ would be translated as ‘leaving Egypt before’ if the original SVO structure is preserved. Another example is ‘在法老的逼迫下’, which would then be placed as ‘the pharaoh oppression under’.

Jeremy pointed out that Chinese speakers tend to include many complements into a sentence while speaking, which takes a toll on the interpreter’s working memory due to the altered placement of words in a phrase and the sequence of phrases according to the target language’s SVO structure.

Another challenge in grammar is the ambiguity of tenses in Chinese and English. Unlike English, there are no verb conjugations in Chinese. Therefore, interpreters would have to consciously identify the correct verb tense out of the 16 possible tenses. Some church interpreters suggested that grammatical incompetence may not pose that huge of a problem due to the Manglish culture in Malaysia. Jeremy pointed out that even Malaysians who have English as their first language may not produce standard English.

Lana voiced her struggle in deciding to interpret using standard English or Manglish in certain contexts. Standard English would produce a grammatical sentence, however the expression can only be conveyed accurately with Malaysian English, which tends to be grammatically flawed. Lana sounded visibly vehement about the dilemma. The paradoxical issue is that employing Manglish would render the sentence ungrammatical, unprofessional and informal; however, the expression in the source language is exclusive to Malaysian Chinese, which would be exclusively intelligible to Malaysian Chinese speakers. As a result, an equivalent expression, if available, would only be found in the Malaysian context, Manglish. In spite of this, most interpreters agree that a certain standard of grammar should still be upheld in church interpreting.

Some informants subtly pointed out that it is difficult to draw the line between actual grammatical incompetence and justifying as Manglish, or the interpreter decides to use Manglish as a more sense-consistent interpretation.

Chinese and English languages have gone through changes in culture and context in Malaysia (Nur Izzati Azman, Lin, & Amini, Alavi, 2020). These changes applied to different aspects of the English language; phonology (Pillai, 2008), pragmatics (Lowenberg, 1991), syntax and lexical items (Newbrook, 1997). However, despite the changes in both languages through time, informants viewed that Malaysian Chinese has preserved standard Chinese to a greater extent than Malaysian English to standard English. Some informants subtly suggested that Chinese has a looser, or easier grammatical structure, therefore most sentences produced or interpreted tend to be grammatical most of the time; the only significant additions to Malaysian Chinese are slangs and expressions.

However, it is evident that multiple aspects of Malaysian English have been bastardized with local slangs and expressions, in addition to different standards of grammar and cultural/contextual interpretation.

Six main factors have been derived from the informants' discussion that lead to the situation of grammatical incompetence in the current church interpreting scene which can be seen as follow:

Not Having Internalized/Intuitive Grammar

Michelle, a university lecturer who is currently undertaking a PhD in areas of first/second language acquisition and innateness of language faculty, shared that through her research and personal experience in interpreting, not having the target language of interpreting as a first language would cause the process of interpreting more mentally taxing. This is a result of absence of internalization of grammar, which happens for speakers' first language. As a result, interpreters who have English as a second language, particularly those who acquired the language post-critical period, would have to consciously construct grammatical structures when interpreting into English.

Non-Standard First Language Input

Some informants mentioned that standard input is critical in sound language production given the innateness of language highlighting although some interpreters have English as their first language and dominant language, grammatical mistakes are prevalent throughout their interpretation. They believed younger church interpreters, especially those in the current paradigm of education style, do not have the standard input due to the Manglish culture they are in. Therefore, it is intuitive for church interpreters, more so for those who lack linguistic awareness, to be oblivious to the distinction between Manglish or standard English. On the other hand, for interpreters who are aware of the differences in Manglish and standard English, they would have still had a rather difficult time processing language production that is not innate/intuitive to them. This would consequently impact another challenge in interpreting that is limited working memory.

Current Education Paradigm of Language Teaching

Emma pointed out that her intuitive nature of sound language production is contributed to her generation of education style since primary school, which grinds grammar to perfection. She said "I come from a generation of making sure that verb agrees with subject, agrees with object." However, with reference to the previous factor mentioned above, most younger interpreters do not have the standard level of grammatical competence.

As mentioned by the informants, grammatical incompetence in younger interpreters is likely to stem from the reformation of the paradigm of language pedagogy to CLT. When asked about the prevalence and severity of grammatical standards across the younger church interpreters, they agreed to the notion that communicative competence might be one of the contributing factors that lead to problems with grammar in church interpreting.

Lack of Self-Knowledge, Metalinguistic Awareness, and Sensitivity to Language

Jeremy highlighted this factor as contributing to grammatical incompetence among church interpreters. Jeremy reckons that there are interpreters whose grammatical incompetence is

associated with the lack of metalinguistic awareness, and it would be difficult for them to self-improve because they do not even know what and where they are wrong, in which case they need to be pointed to their mistakes “exhaustively” to see clearly what mistakes have been made in interpreting. Linguistic awareness, or metalinguistic awareness refers to “individuals' ability to reflect on, and match intuitively, spoken and written utterances with their knowledge of the language” (Masny, 1997, p.106).

When asked about the prospects of starting a grammar course for church interpreters, Emma viewed that many interpreters might not participate in the course because they might think that they have been interpreting for a long time and have done well so far, achieving the outcome of interpreting in most sessions when these interpreters themselves are the ones who evidently, have common grammatical mistakes. Emma attributes this condition to lack of self-knowledge amongst interpreters “lack of self-knowledge. So, I’ve been doing it (making mistakes) and no one has told me, so I think I’ve done well”.

Michelle brought forward an example which could be apparently affiliated to her metalinguistic ability: “this is meta, as in you know about language, as in you know how to analyze language”.

Lana’s metalinguistic ability can be identified subtly through the exchange in the interview. In the first few minutes of the interview, Lana was ranting about her deliberation and dilemma of interpreting a certain Chinese expression. Her deliberation fulfils the criteria for metalinguistic ability; that ‘tacit knowledge is made explicit ranging from spontaneous self-correction to explicit reflection in the production of utterances’, and ‘individuals exhibit linguistic awareness in decoding ambiguous sentences.’

Nature of Voluntary Interpreting Work in Church

The informants highlighted the nature of voluntary work as a contributing factor to the subpar standard of church interpreting. Emma said “because we are all volunteers, we are more forgiving” and elucidated the nature of voluntary work in church as more forgiving in nature as compared to interpreting in the professional scene where clients are entitled to demand a certain level of competence or performance, and interpreters either fulfil that expectation and be remunerated or be put off as incompetent. This condition in church interpreting could give rise to the lack of motivation and awareness of room for improvement; as put forward previously by Jeremy that some interpreters need correction from other interpreters to be aware of their own mistakes.

Manglish Culture

Some of the informants did not advocate the need for perfect grammar. When asked whether lack of sound grammar is associated with the Manglish culture, Jeremy suggest that there are two types of Manglish speakers, the first group consists of interpreters who are aware of the distinction between Manglish and standard English, and is competent in standard English but choose to speak Manglish in daily speech and interpreting settings. The second group consists of interpreters who lack metalinguistic awareness and are consequently unable to distinctly differentiate between Manglish and standard English. When asked if these interpreters should then speak standard

English to improve in interpreting, Jeremy said “I don't think one should just change that for the sake of improving one's (quality of) interpreting”.

Jeremy condoned the use of Manglish in interpreting and daily life. Even though he upholds standard grammar as a personal benchmark and self-imposed expectation in church interpreting, the exchange suggests that Manglish use in daily speech and interpreting is permissible due to socio-cultural reasons.

Emma pointed out that even a trainer for church interpreting trainings suggested that it's fine, as long as whatever is interpreted is intelligible to the audience, as far as the parameters and particular demographic of audience that pertains to the interpreters/informants of this research is concerned.

It is important to note that the informants' responses did not necessarily match with their actual interpreting performance. Upon triangulation of informants' interview responses and observation of actual interpreting performance in interpreting sessions, it was found that some interpreters had:

- i) near perfect grammar. Grammatical mistakes were scarce throughout the entire session.
- ii) occasional grammatical mistakes, observed to be misrenderings instead of actual incompetence
- iii) frequent grammatical mistakes, observed to be due to the lack of comprehensive grammatical competence
- iv) very frequent grammatical mistakes, participant exhibits evident and prominent grammatical incompetence

It is important to note that a single interpreting session cannot decide if that particular interpreter is competent or incompetent. Multiple factors have to be taken into consideration, for example, the particular speaker's speech style, content, mental wellbeing of the interpreter, etc.

Some interpreters who had occasional grammatical mistakes were found to have metalinguistic awareness, but was not able to perform to the benchmark of grammar due to other factors such as limited working memory. Some other interpreters made frequent grammatical mistakes, however when triangulated with the interview response, it was found that metalinguistic awareness was not the challenge, but lack of comprehensive grammatical competence. Another interpreter was found to be totally oblivious to the prevalence of grammatical mistakes in her interpreting session, which evidently exhibits a profound inadequacy of grammatical competence in her language proficiency, let alone metalinguistic awareness.

This finding asserts the importance of metalinguistic awareness as a component in interpreting and its challenges, and forms the potential motivation and direction of progress in interpreting.

Culture-Specific Items

Culture-specific items (CSI) was the second most prominent challenge in church interpreting. Culture is a complex of beliefs, attitudes, values, and rules which a group of people share and how life and its manifestations are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression (Ng, & Amini, 2019; Kuan, Dagusti, Amini, & Rabbani, 2019). In the context of this study, the parameters of the term “culture” is not restricted to normative racial or geographical classifications. Elements in interpreting that are thematically classified as culture-specific items include religious terms, Christianese, cultural expressions, idioms and puns. Religious terms and

Christianese fall under the social parameters of church setting as a culture; while translation of puns, cultural expressions and idioms are classified under normative racial parameters as culture. They are discussed as follow:

Religious Terms

There are two subcategories for religious terms, which are biblical terms and theological terms. The rationale for this distinction is that the approach/solution to this CSI may be different across the subcategories, therefore each subcategory could be isolated and analysed in detail.

Biblical Terms

This particular CSI was put forward in the interview with Sarah. One particular example of biblical terms is the term “挽回祭” (*wǎn huí jì*) which appears in 1 John 2:2, which is translated as “propitiation” in the NKJV Bible; in Chinese, the term “挽回祭” which can literally be back translated as “atoning/redeeming sacrifice”. Sarah mentioned that the challenge, in most cases, is the difficulty in choosing the approach to interpret the expression. The first approach is to uphold text fidelity by translating as propitiation; while the second approach is to translate it in “layman” terms, rendering “atoning sacrifice”. The paradox is that there is a tacit concept among church interpreters that it is best that interpreters aim to maintain text fidelity, or literal equivalence (in terms of lexical items) (Yaqubi, Tahir, & Amini, 2018) when it comes to biblical terms; however, for the unchurched people and the average churchgoers, a substantial portion of these audience demographics might not understand what is propitiation. Hence, even though the right word is accurately employed, it would not have achieved the outcome of the interpretation.

Theological Terms

Theological terms differ from biblical terms in that the former does not necessarily appear in the Bible, despite being Christian terms. For example, the concept of trinity, the study of Pneumatology, the Pentateuch, etc. These technical theological terms are not typically mentioned by speakers of weekly services, due to the fact that the audience that the speaker is trying to appeal to are average churchgoers who might not have studied theological/religious discourse. Hence, these terms are usually only mentioned in specific seminars or courses.

Sarah and Stephanie were previously arranged by the church to interpret in theological courses and seminars, so they had experience in this domain of church interpreting. Both Sarah and Stephanie raised this subject as a challenge in church interpreting.

Christianese

Christianese is a term used to describe the “language” which Christians use. While Christianese may contain technical Christian terms, it is largely reckoned by its speakers as an entirely different language variety in itself. Coined and perpetuated by speakers themselves, Christianese is a language variety (or religiolect or dialect, may be used interchangeably) itself. It is important to note that Christianese is not religiously used among church members within the demographic of

this study, however for the purpose of this research, the term Christianese will be used to refer to this particular CSI.

Michelle pointed out some Christianese terms wrongly interpreted would have a different depth of impact on the listener. As put forward by Michelle, the terms “stay” and “dwell” contain very different depths of meaning in Christianese. To put the term “dwell” into perspective, the concept is drawn from several references made in the Bible regarding the “indwelling of the spirit”:

From Michelle’s interview, the phrase “we say that words are living” is an example of Christianese. Michelle argues that interpreters who have a certain depth of understanding towards Christianese can have a profound impact on the consequent interpreting performance, implications of which would explore the prospects of professional interpreting in church setting. The challenge is that interpreters need to be aware of these Christianese terms and interpret not just to the extent of literal accuracy, but to the depth of meaning as the speaker intends in the source language.

Idiomatic Expressions, Cultural Expressions, and Puns

Challenges in interpreting idiomatic expressions, cultural expressions and puns were extensively highlighted by Lana. The following are some examples from the excerpts of the interview regarding the challenges she faced

According to Lana, one of the factors that lead to difficulty in interpreting CSI is the lack of cross culturally equivalent idiomatic expressions. In example 1, she elaborates the dilemma in interpreting the idiomatic expression of “后浪推前浪” to English. Out of context, the expression “后浪推前浪”, which backtranslates to “the waves behind push forward the waves in front” is an analogy that refers to the state where the past generation will excel and surpass their predecessors, and that the new is constantly evolving to replace the old. Since there are no equivalent expressions cross culturally in English (as far the interpreter’s knowledge is concerned), it would still be rather awkward for an interpreter to either interpret the expression literally or interpret by explaining with context. The former approach would render the aesthetics and the underlying meaning nonsensical and unidentifiable; the latter approach would render some sense-consistency, however given the small window for interpretation, it would be difficult and awkward for the interpreter to explain the idiomatic expression with a story and subsequently, tie it back to the speaker’s content. Omission is noted to be the least desirable strategy in interpreting.

Lana elucidated her deliberation over the choice of style as an approach to interpreting CSI. She mentioned that the expression “哦, 你很厉害哦” is not standard Chinese, which means that this Malaysian expression should be exclusively intelligible to Malaysian Chinese speakers. She goes on to consider a near equivalent expression which is available in Manglish but not in standard English, which is the expression “Wah, you very pro oh”. In the deliberation over the choice of expression in the target language, formality is prioritized in terms of speech styles. Here, the Chinese expression does not appear apparently informal or ungrammatical; however, in the context of Manglish, “Wah, you very pro oh” sounds very much like a slang with informal undertones, not to mention it is entirely ungrammatical and nonsensical in standard English terms. Lana holds that it is important to maintain the same level of formality with the speaker’s language, however paradoxically, there would be no equivalent expressions if she were to preserve the formality of the interpretation, otherwise formality has to be sacrificed for sense-consistency.

Another CSI ~~was~~ mentioned by Emma was on the translation of humour or puns. Emma ~~views~~ noted that it is nearly impossible to translate puns due to the fact that the humour in puns is language specific, therefore the same weightage of humour cannot be carried over across to the target language, unless there is a different pun in the target language that carries the same sense.

Emma held that there are two desirable approaches to translating humour. One is the faithful rendering of exact objects within the analogy, or interpret with a similar analogy/humour from the target language. For Emma since puns are essentially untranslatable, the English speakers could understand what it is about, though the weightage of humor is not carried over.

Limited Working Memory

None of the informants brought up the subject of limited working memory; it is a challenge consequent of mentally taxing components in interpreting, to which none of the informants was aware of, that constitutes the challenge itself.

Most informants in this research exhibit metalinguistic awareness as interpreters, but were observed to be unable to produce the standard benchmark of grammatical competence. Upon broaching the subject, it was found that the informants' inability to produce the minimum benchmark of grammatical competence was associated with limited working memory, as most of them were able to identify and produce sound/flawed grammar in isolation, however they were unable to perform as well in interpreting. Through the interview responses and data analysis, it became apparent that limited working memory as a challenge permeates various domains of interpreting difficulties that tend to take up a significant portion of cognitive load, for example, complex sentences with different SVO structures, idiomatic expressions, syntactic ambiguity. These mentally taxing difficulties result in cognitive constraints in the interpreter's working memory, causing subpar standards in the actual practical interpretation, despite the interpreters' being well-equipped with knowledge and theoretical approach to interpreting.

These professional interpreters frequently seem to perform at a level of near-saturation in terms of their cognitive resources and capacity (Gile, 1999). Macnamara and Conway (2016) found that working memory capacity is an essential predictor of success in simultaneous interpreting; a substantial amount of literature recognizes cognitive constraints as one of the most critical limiting factors in performance of simultaneous interpreting. Köpke and Nespoulous's (2006) study on expert and novice interpreters working memory performance revealed that certain aspects of working memory are more established in novices than experts. The findings suggest that this points to a more highly specialised skillset that is independent from working memory once the interpreter has attained a certain degree of expertise, which could potentially be subserved by their long term memory by means of specific routines (Ericsson & Kintsch, 1995; Amini, & Amini, 2017), highly specialised schemes (Sweller, 2003), or via episodic buffer (Baddeley, 2000). This would consequently point to important implications in solutions or approaches to resolving challenges. It is important to note however, that these studies revolve around professional interpreting and translation (PIT) and simultaneous interpreting, while the context of this research in church interpreting is a non-professional setting that employs short consecutive interpreting. Some interpreting tasks that constituted mentally taxing components were SVO reconstruction from source language to target language, structural/tense ambiguity, lexical ambiguity. gendered

pronouns, singular plural forms approach to interpretation of CSI, idiomatic expressions, cultural expressions, religious terminology, and lengthy sentences from the speaker.

Answer to Research Question 2

It is important to note that all of the informants were not aware of limited working memory as a challenge in itself and that it forms the root problem that permeates across different domains of difficult tasks in interpreting.

Grammar

When asked about the types of solutions recommended for grammatical incompetence/challenges, all the informants suggested that only by practice can grammar be improved. Emma said, “It’s just practice. It’s like, anything to do with language, (if) you really want to master a language, you have to use it.”

The following consists of four main methods for practice as suggested by the informants.

Grinding Grammar by Reading More

Lana attributes her highly competent grammar to her love for language and reading in general: “I used to read a lot of books, and I want to understand the culture, and from there I learnt”.

Lana mentioned that she would read very often, and would be able to pick up many things in language without intentionally and consciously learning the language, for example, grammar, vocabulary, even metalinguistic awareness.

Emma believed grammar is not built overnight, therefore there should be an ongoing process or pursuit in linguistic competence: “The solution is you have to really read as much stuff as you can. So, this prep work is like ongoing for life”.

Jeremy pointed out that interpreters, especially those whose input had been Manglish as a child and struggle with grammatical competence in interpreting, should read more and consciously relearn grammar.

Applying Sound Grammar to Speech and Writing

Jeremy said that his subconscious acquisition of grammatical competence is accredited to the assimilation and application of the learning process in daily life.

Emma mentioned that being a sermon speaker could help because as she writes, she would visualize how the English structure would be and hear how the Chinese interpretation sounds like during the sermon. This is indirectly a form of application to learning grammar.

Michelle views that learning sound grammar includes applying it to both speech and writing as comprehensive approach for practice in sound language production “the term should not be ‘learning grammar’, it should be application of correct grammar’. Then, wherever you go, whether you're writing, speaking, or interpreting, or translating, you will be applying the right grammar...”

Internalize Through Practice

Emma stressed that grammar has to be internalized overtime. This is to ensure that grammar becomes natural and subconscious in language production so that it would not become one of the cognitive constraints in interpreting.

Listening to Other Interpreters and Interpret Mentally

Informants suggested that listening to other interpreters and interpret in mind concurrently is a popular practice method in church, and is apparently one of the most effective and advocated method that directly improves interpreting.

Stephanie and Sarah mentioned that it has become habitual that they would always mentally interpret concurrently with the interpreters during regular church services, and referring to YouTube or the church websites for sermons for individual practice. They stressed that this practice has been of significant help to their interpreting performance.

Michelle noted that as a Chinese to Malay interpreter back in Sabah as a youth, she would employ this method of practice, that by listening to other interpreters, she could cross-refer the accuracy of her own interpretation with the interpreter on stage, among other aspects of interpreting. Aside from practice, Michelle stressed that it is important to start interpreting from a young age.

Jeremy pointed out that it is difficult for interpreters who do not have metalinguistic ability to improve by themselves through self/individual practice.

Another factor that indirectly contributes to grammatical incompetence is the attitude of interpreters, or church members towards interpreting. In church interpreting setting little expectations are imposed on the interpreters and there is no “penalty for quality”, thereby potentially affecting the motivation and awareness of room for improvement (metalinguistic ability), Emma commented: “God will move people to understand”.

Emma and Michelle suggested that it would be for the best if interpreters raised a certain standard of grammar and imposed expectations on themselves, since the culture of the church is forgiving in nature towards interpreters. Michelle voiced that the culture in Sabah is very different from that of West Malaysia: “In East Malaysia, when you interpret, it's a very serious divine work over there that even listeners would come and (give) feedback whether you're good or bad”.

Therefore, since external culture is not able to propel the drive for progress, self-imposed expectations are necessary for interpreters to improve.

Culture-Specific Items

In the challenge of interpreting CSI, informants provided several different solutions to different aspects of CSI. In the aspect of interpreting religious terms, Emma pointed out that the solution to improving in biblical terms is none other than reading the Bible more, she even reiterated several times. “Read the bible. All the time, read the bible. Read the bible more. So, even when I'm not interpreting I note it down and I check it so next time, when the word recurs, then at least I have it”. She mentioned that she would note challenges that other interpreters' encounter, for example a lexical item which she doesn't know. She would then search it up and have it stored at her

disposal in the event that the word recurs in sermons. This method is used by Stephanie and Michelle, who have a checklist of her own challenges in terms of religious lexical items.

In interpreting theological terms, Sarah would usually read up beforehand. It is not customary for speakers to use theological terms in weekly services as the attendees may consist of average churchgoers or unchurched people, to whom theological terms are unintelligible; theological terms or technical religious jargon would more commonly be used in seminars or training courses. Sarah said that she would read the script or the content of the courses beforehand, to make sure she goes through all the terms that she does not know.

The process of acquiring and understanding the nuances and meanings of these expressions is just likened to language learning, speakers need to be assimilated and enculturate themselves to fully and comprehensively learn its language and culture. Michelle suggests that interpreters should recognize Christianese in use to be able to accurately render the correct interpretation that carries over the depth of meaning from the speaker to the target language.

Emma and Angela addressed the issue with translating idiomatic expressions and humour by suggesting choosing approaches as a solution. They suggested that the more desirable approach would be to render a similar-sense pun or idiomatic expression that carries over not the metaphorical or literal meaning, but the depth of meaning or humour. If a similar sounding pun or idiomatic expression is not found, interpreters could opt to interpret by rendering the exact objects within the analogy or explain it and subsequently tie it back to the speaker's context.

When choosing these approaches in interpreting, there are some considerations that have to be taken into account. Lana addressed formality as an important factor. In most situations it would be inappropriate to use informal interpretation when the speaker is using formal language. However, preserving the speaker's tone of formality is, but, a guideline for consideration, since there are some expressions that are unavailable in the same tone of formality.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

There is a dire lack of research in the field of church interpreting and this study could provide some insight from some of the non-professional interpreters who are seasoned through their years of experience in interpreting church sermons. The study sought insight into the church interpreting scene, where many church interpreters are untrained and would presumably result in flawed interpretation of the sermons in most cases due to the lack of a standard for regulation in the appointment of interpreters.

Findings of this study revealed that some of the most prominent challenges faced by non-professionals church interpreters in Malaysia include grammatical issues and culture-specific items. Interpreters pointed out that SVO reconstruction was the one of the most mentally taxing components in grammar, followed by tense ambiguity whereby interpreters have to consciously identify English language components which are absent in Chinese speech, for example, gendered pronouns, conjugated verbs, and singular plural forms. Interview responses elucidated several factors leading to grammatical incompetence: not having internalized/intuitive grammar, non-standard first language input, the flaws in current education as a result of paradigm shift in pedagogy, the lack of metalinguistic awareness, the nature of church voluntary work and attitude towards the Manglish culture. Upon triangulation of informants' interview responses and observation of their practical interpreting session, it was found that not all interpreters who

interpreted poorly in terms of grammar were proven to have a lack of metalinguistic ability, since popular belief has it that correlation equals causation; that grammatical incompetence is associated with the lack of metalinguistic awareness.

Culture-specific items were found as another challenge in church interpreting. Classified into three categories, religious terms, Christianese, and idiomatic expressions and pun, the difficulty associated with these CSI is the technicality of religious terms and lack of equivalent expressions in the target language. Another challenge derived from the data analysis is limited working memory. Limited working memory is a challenge superimposed upon the aforementioned challenges, due to its nature whereby cognitive constraints point to a consequent of mentally taxing components in interpreting. This indicates a “mutual causality” relationship between limited working memory and grammatical/CSI challenges, to which none of the informants were aware of.

The findings of this research also revealed that practice is a general rule of thumb towards all challenges. Four main practice methods were found when it comes to acquiring grammatical competence: reading more, application of sound grammar in daily speech and writing, internalize grammar through practice and mentally interpret concurrently with other interpreters in their interpreting sessions. The need for more readings to improve mastery of biblical knowledge and theological discourse was also emphasized. A solution to managing CSI in interpreting would be to take into consideration certain aspects before choosing the approach to interpret. The general and most desirable approach to interpreting CSI is to render an equivalent expression in the target language; in the event that no equivalent expressions are available, two approaches are recommended to be employed, rather than omission, that is to render the exact objects within the expression literally or explain elaborately and tie back to the speaker’s context. Considerations to be accounted for include preservation of formality and appropriateness in terms of style from source language to target language.

Practice was found as a predictor for long term interpreting success. They explained the internalization of difficult tasks in interpreting as a long-term coping strategy. It is important to note that the informants only provided solutions that improve interpreting overtime in the long term; most of the responses towards challenges faced did not include immediate coping strategies. This points to the automatization of interpreting tasks, which when internalized, would relieve cognitive stress. This finding is in line with Köpke & Nespoulous (2006) that a highly specialised skillset is no longer dependent on working memory once a certain degree of expertise in interpreting is attained. These expert skills could be subserved by long-term memory by means of specific routines, highly specialised schemes, and via the episodic buffer. This indicates that non-professional church interpreters are able to perform overtime cognitive abilities of professional interpreters despite not undergoing interpreting training, which points to questioning the need for professional interpreting in religious setting. It may be premature to question the level of performance professional interpreters are capable of in comparison to non-professionals, more research is needed to substantiate this audacious claim. Given that non-professionals are able to perform certain cognitive abilities as professional interpreters, the solutions and typology of challenges derived from this research could have potential implications on church interpreters, professional interpreting studies and future research.

The findings of this study could provide insight and form the basis for future non-professional church interpreting trainings. This would benefit aspiring novice interpreters by

providing a clear and effective direction for improvement in church interpreting. Novice interpreters could have insight into the challenges faced by church interpreters and adopt solutions explored in this paper. This would result in a general improvement in the church interpreting scene in Malaysia.

This study may be able to provide insight to the interpreters who have found their “place” in serving in church interpreting, and improve as a non-professional interpreter. The findings of this study may serve as a basis for future church interpreting trainings. This might be beneficial in improving the overall quality of interpreting, mitigate problems, and aid the individual interpreters themselves in their spiritual journey to perfect their interpreting and their service in the ministry (Amini, Amini, Alavi, & Esfandiari, 2017).

The discipline of professional interpreting would do well to refer to the untrained and unprofessional church interpreters who are able to demonstrate superior interpreting performance comparable to that of professional standards. As mentioned by Pérez-González & Susam-Saraeva (2012), professionals tend to be indoctrinated into the norms of professional interpreting, especially those demanding close adherence to the source text, which differs from non-professionals who are more likely to be innovative and creative in retelling the content more intelligibly to the audience, given that they are, often times part of the audience themselves, which enhances their sense of initiative, authority and agency.

The dearth of research conducted in the field of church interpreting, let alone in the Malaysian setting, points to the need for more research consists of multiple demographics and domains to represent the general population. Future research could look into sampling data from other Malaysian Christian denominations on church interpreting and increasing the sample size; studying the different customs and culture of church interpreting in different denominations would provide a more comprehensive representation of the church interpreting scene in Malaysia. Subsequent studies could look into broadening the typology of challenges and looking into users’ quality expectations. Future studies could consider the prospects of “natural interpreter” and demographics-exclusive qualitative benchmarks for non-professional church interpreting.

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