

## Triggers in Comparison: Analyzing Explicitation Across Levels of Interpreters' Experience in Consecutive Interpreting<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The current study intended to explore the use of explicitation in consecutive interpreting, recognizing its significance as a strategic approach, particularly given the time constraints inherent in the interpreting process. Hence, the researchers carried out a mixed-methods experiment that comprised 9 trainee interpreters and 5 experienced interpreters who engaged in English-Persian consecutive interpreting (CI). The study used both product analysis, which involved comparing the source and target texts, and process analysis, which included retrospective interviews and notes, to examine explicitation behavior. The product study primarily tried to find instances of explicitation employed by both groups, whereas the process analysis sought to reveal the underlying reasons for its utilization. The results did not show a significant difference in the reasons for explicitation between trainee and experienced interpreters. Nevertheless, a noteworthy distinction was observed in the manner in which the two groups treated this particular issue. The findings indicated that experienced interpreters are often motivated by the need for clarification. This suggests that experienced interpreters place a high importance on guaranteeing that the interpreted message is clear and easily understood by the audience. They may employ explicitation as a means to communicate the intended message with greater effectiveness. However, trainee interpreters used explicitations as a means to make up for their own poor proficiency, by filling in any gaps that may occur because of their inadequate abilities. The results of this study could be instrumental for interpreter training programs, as they provide empirical evidence on the different reasons behind explicitation strategies between trainee and experienced interpreters.

**Keywords:** Consecutive interpreting, explicitation, interpreting experience, Triggers of explicitation

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## 1. Introduction

Explicitation is a crucial component in the transmission of meaning during translation, regardless of the specific language pair used (Blum-Kulka, 1986). Nevertheless, in specific forms of conveying meaning such as interpreting, the restrictions imposed by the medium might lead to alterations in explicitness (Gumul, 2017). Explicitation is defined as the act of making translation adjustments by the interpreter to offer additional information that may be deduced from the context, context, situation, and culture. These shifts pertain to the outcome of interpretation and are mostly associated with the specific form of explicitation employed (Tang, 2018).

The act of interpreting is a complex cognitive endeavor that functions within a multitude of limitations. Given the significant mental effort required and the limited time available for interpretation (Gile, 2009), it can be deduced that explicitation adds an extra difficulty for interpreters, hence intensifying the difficulties they encounter.

## 2. Theoretical Background

### Explicitation in Interpreting Studies

Gumul's (2006) study specifically examined explicitations in English-Polish simultaneous interpreting (SI) done by interpreting students. The investigation identified four distinct types of explicitation in SI: lexical repetition, meaning specification, the use of mitigating language, and the incorporation of speech-organizing elements. Moreover, the study found that subconscious explicitation was responsible for the bulk of explicitating alterations (93.15%) in the interpretation outputs, whereas strategic explicitation accounted for a lower proportion (6.85%).

Similarly, Tang and Li (2016) conducted a supplementary investigation on the process of explicitation in English-Chinese CI. The study aimed to analyze the target texts of professional and trainee interpreters to understand the reasons behind their use of explicitation, as well as the frequency of explicitation in each group. The study findings indicated that professionals use explicit language more frequently in their works. The trainee interpreters, however, employ explicitation as a tactic to make up for the loss of expertise (Tang & Li, 2016).

In another study, Tang and Li (2017) examined the impact of interpreters' competence on their use of explicitation in Chinese-English CI. They discovered that

the majority of explicitations were connected to personal experiences and mostly served the purpose of providing clarifications. The study also identified disparities between experienced and apprentice interpreters.

In a similar way, Morselli (2018) conducted research on explicitness in interpreting in different language pairs. The study used the European Parliament Translation and Interpreting Corpus from different languages, namely Spanish, French, German and Dutch to conduct a comparable and parallel corpus analysis. However, the study did not yield conclusive evidence regarding whether interpreted or translated texts exhibit greater or lesser explicitness compared to untranslated speeches.

Moreover, Fu and Chen (2019) investigated the phenomenon of explicitation in English-Chinese CI. They employed a parallel corpus comprising both CI and SI across seven distinct subjects. This qualitative research uncovered specific aspects in interpreted texts that depict the interpersonal connections between interpreters and speakers on multiple levels. The study proved that the role of interpreters in speeches, particularly dialogue speeches, extends beyond what the researchers established as the description of an interpreter.

Building on previous research, Gumul (2021) investigated the correlation between explicitation and cognitive load in simultaneous interpreting by trainee interpreters. The results confirmed the hypothesis that explicating shifts in interpretation may be induced by increased cognitive burden and be used as a strategy to disguise processing difficulties. It further revealed that executing explicating shifts can lead to heightened cognitive load and trigger processing problems.

While the topic of explicitation in interpreting has garnered significant attention from scholars globally, research within Iran's Interpreting Studies remains scarce. To date, the sole existing study on this topic is the work conducted by Mohammadi (in press). He undertook a study on explicitation in simultaneous interpreting, focusing on the translation of DMs. The study intended to understand the conditions and strategies behind explicitation during discourse monitoring. It was grounded in Coherence Theory, which posits that texts inherently possess coherence and that analyzing various coherence relations is vital for text comprehension. The researcher analyzed the translation of discourse markers in simultaneous interpretation using an inventory based on coherence theory, which categorized discourse relations into inference, elaboration, contrast, and temporal

sequence. Two raters evaluated the instances of DMs translation strategies. The corpus included three lectures by Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, interpreted on Press TV2. The results indicated that the interpreter used explicitation in 80% of cases, with addition being the most common strategy (43%), followed by modification and omission (18% each).

However, numerous research has been undertaken on explicitation in Translation Studies in Iran (Igder & Karimnia, 2010; Baleghizadeh & Sharifi, 2010; Beikian et al. 2013; Vahedi Kia & Oulaeinia, 2016) and explicitation in audiovisual translation (Yazdani Moghaddam et al., 2017).

To bridge this research gap, the current study aimed to empirically explore the phenomenon of explicitation in consecutive interpreting (CI) from English to Persian (E-P). The research aimed to determine the factors that necessitate explicitation, taking into account the interpreters' level of experience in engaging in CI. The following questions were investigated:

1. What are the reasons for explicitations in the experienced interpreters' consecutive interpreting?
2. What are the reasons for explicitations in the trainees' consecutive interpreting?
3. Is there any statistically significant difference between trainee and experienced interpreters in terms of the reasons behind explicating behavior?

### **3. Methodology**

The present experimental study adopted a mixed-methods exploratory approach to identify the reasons behind the explicitations employed by experienced and trainee interpreters in English-Persian CI.

#### **3.1 Participants**

A total of 14 participants took part in this study and were divided into two groups, experienced interpreters (EI) and trainee interpreters (TI), based on their working experience as consecutive interpreters. All participants spoke Persian as their native tongue and English as a foreign language.

Initially, seven experienced interpreters participated in the study; however, two of them withdrew, resulting in a remaining sample of five experienced interpreters who possessed official certification in the domain of English translation. These interpreters were selected based on snowball sampling with varying levels of

experience in consecutive interpreting at meetings and conferences, ranging from several months to several years.

The trainee group consisted of nine B.A. students from Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman. These students participated in a 16-week systematic interpreting teaching program, following the methodology proposed by Dawrant and Setton (2016). Each teaching session had a duration of 90 minutes. The participants were recruited through a random sampling technique and provided their consent to participate. The information pertaining to the participants is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

Participants	Age	Gender	Status	Level of education	Working experience
TI 1	21	M	Trainee	BA student	No experience
TI 2	21	F	Trainee	BA student	No experience
TI 3	23	M	Trainee	BA student	No experience
TI 4	22	F	Trainee	BA student	No experience
TI 5	26	M	Trainee	BA student	No experience
TI 6	22	M	Trainee	BA student	No experience
TI 7	25	F	Trainee	BA student	No experience
TI 8	21	F	Trainee	BA student	No experience
TI 9	22	F	Trainee	BA student	No experience
PI 1	37	M	Freelance interpreter	Ph.D. in translation studies	3 years (10 hours per week)
EI 2	33	M	Staff and freelance interpreter	M.A. in English translation	10 years (20 hours per week)
EI 3	30	M	Freelance interpreter	Ph.D. candidate in translation studies	10 years (40 hours per week)
EI 4	21	M	Staff interpreter	B.A. translation studies student	2 months (12 hours per week)
EI 5	46	M	Freelance interpreter	M.A. in translation studies	26 years (48 hours per week)

### **3.2 Material**

The speech delivered by Donald Trump, the former president of the United States, was selected as a corpus to analyze the explicitation tendencies of participants in CI. Spanning approximately 9 minutes and 42 seconds, the discourse centered on the strategic measures undertaken by the United States in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic.

The utterance exhibited a standard rate of 140 words per minute. In order to acquaint the interpreter trainees with the pronunciation and manner of Trump's speech, they were exposed to a number of his speeches throughout their CI training. Furthermore, the experienced interpreters encountered no difficulty in comprehending Trump's manner of speaking due to their prior exposure to his speeches. It is significant to observe that the selected speech was not previously audited by the experienced interpreters nor the trainee interpreters prior to its presentation. The subject 'Corona Virus' was chosen in an effort to minimize the likelihood that participants lacked knowledge regarding the matter.

### **3.3 Data Collection Procedure**

The collection of pertinent data from the participants involved the implementation of multiple steps. Initially, the attendees were given a briefing sheet containing the main theme, duration, and presenter of the speech.

Next, the participants carried out the main CI task, which included interpreting the speech in a consecutive manner. Their interpretations were recorded for subsequent transcription and analysis. Trainee interpreters performed their consecutive interpretation in front of one of the researchers in a language laboratory. On each occasion, only a single individual was requested to provide an interpretation. Given the challenge of assessing experienced interpreters in person, data from experienced interpreters was collected online. The Zoom Platform was utilized to both play the chosen speech and capture the performance, due to this rationale.

Following the completion of participants' interpretations, a retrospective interview was conducted with each of the interpreters to gather their explanations regarding their interpretative process. Each interview lasted between 30 to 50 minutes. The researchers posed a series of questions during the retrospective interview to avoid any potential gaps in information and to gain deeper insights into the reasons for explicitation in CI. The Persian language was used to ask questions

such as "What were your thoughts when you added... to...?", "Why did you replace... with...?", and "Is this your usual approach when conducting CI?"

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

The data used for analyzing explicitation in this study contained the recorded digital audio files of interpreters' CI products, their retrospective interview, as well as their notes. The study used Tang's (2018) modified version of Halliday's (2014) three metafunctions as a theoretical framework to detect explicitation occurrences in the data.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 Research Question 1**

The first question dealt with the reasons underlying experienced interpreters' explicating behavior. For each recognized explicitation in their CI output, the researchers asked the experienced interpreters about the reason for their explicating behavior in the interview session. Consequently, 5 distinct types of reasons were recognized through this stage.

The first category of explicitation emerged in scenarios where interpreters faced challenges in recalling the original verbal communication. This was attributed to either the inadequacy of their notational system or the difficulty in selecting an optimal approach for the accurate transmission of meaning. Logically, interpreters resorted to explicitation to 'manage time' to ponder about the appropriate way to express the meaning. This type of explicitation was usually followed by language disfluencies, i.e., "phenomena that interrupt the flow of speech and do not add propositional content to an utterance" (Gosy, 2007, p. 93). Language disfluency is usually marked by silent pauses, vocalized hesitations, vowel/consonant lengthening, and repairs (Shreve et al., 2011). Therefore, language disfluency could be considered as an indication of 'time management' motivation.

The second reason for explicitation was 'filling gaps'. Experienced interpreters may resort to incorporating information from the preceding co-text or the cultural context of the source speech when they are unable to understand, remember, or convey the original material. This approach guarantees a consistent dissemination of information, so preventing the target audience from being diverted or seeing any lack of expertise on the part of the interpreters.

The third incentive is designated as the 'clarifying' reason. This occurs when there is no identifiable indicator of difficulty following the explicitation, and the clarified information may be simply inferred from the original message.

The fourth type of reason behind explicitation is referred to as 'reinforcing the original message'. It typically happens when there is no clear indication of difficulties following the explicitation, and the information provided is important for the speaker's appraisal information (including engagement-based explicitation, attitude-based explicitation, and graduation-based explicitation).

The final form of incentive for explicitation was connected to the interpreters' notes made throughout CI. To put it simply, the way notes were taken and organized were the source of explicating behavior.

Considering the reasons behind explicitations made by experienced interpreters, the frequency of explicitation is reported in Table 2. As the table represents, the majority of explicitations were experiential ones.

Table 2. Number of Explicitations Made by Experienced Interpreters Based on Reasons in English-Persian Consecutive Interpreting.

		Time-managing (R1)		Gap-filling (R2)		Clarifying (R3)		Reinforcing (R4)		Note-taking (R5)		Total
		add	sub	add	sub	add	sub	Add	Sub	add	sub	
Experiential Explicitation	Modifiers	7	2	15	8	29	4	5	2	1	2	75
	Processes	3	1	22	9	17	11	4		2	1	70
	Circumstantial adjunct	3		10	8	30	4	11			2	68
	Participants	2	3	10	17	7	7		1		2	49
Interpersonal explicitation	Engagement			3	1	3		2				9
	Attitudinal			1	2	6	1	3	1	1	1	16
	Graduation			5	2	3		17	3		1	31
Textual explicitation	Referencing	1		3		5		1				10
	Filling Elliptical	2		3		7						12
	Connectives	4	1	4	1	19	2	2				33
												373



#### 4.2 Research Question 2

The second research question aimed to ascertain the underlying reasons for the explicitations observed in trainees' behavior. The data analysis revealed the presence of 5 distinct categories of causes. Interestingly, the grounds for trainees' explicating behavior were identical to those identified for experienced interpreters.

Table 3 displays the frequency of explicitation employed by the trainee interpreters, categorized by types of reasons.

Table 3. Number of Explicitations Made by Trainee Interpreters Based on Reasons in English-Persian Consecutive Interpreting.

		Time-managing (R1)		Gap-filling (R2)		Clarifying (R3)		Reinforcing (R4)		Note-taking (R5)		Total
		add	sub	add	sub	add	sub	Add	Sub	add	sub	
<b>Experiential explicitation</b>	Modifiers	15		35	23	35	5	10		1	1	125
	Processes	13	2	37	30	37	3	5		1		128
	Circumstantial adjunct	7	4	9	22	21	2	11		1	1	78
	Participants	7	3	26	31	18	3	1		2	1	92
<b>Interpersonal explicitation</b>	Engagement	1		4	1	2		4	1			13
	Attitudinal	2		10	2	3	1	6		1		23
	Graduation	5		23	7	5	1	30	3			74
<b>Textual explicitation</b>	Referencing	2		3	2	8	1					16
	Filling Elliptical	9		12		20		1				42
	Connectives	15	1	21		21		4				61
											652	

Considering the above table, it is clear that trainee interpreters made the most explicitations in the experiential explicitation category, while their patterns were identical to those of the experienced interpreters. The majority of the numbers are related to process-based explicitations.

### 4.3 Research Question 3

The last research question was in search of statistically significant difference between trainee and experienced interpreters' explicating behavior in terms of their reasons. To this end, there was a need to compare the two groups' causes for explicitation. Table 4 presents the reasons behind explicitation for members of each group.

Table 4. Number of Explicitations Made by Experienced and Trainee Interpreters.

Participant	Time-managing		Gap-filling		Clarifying		Reinforcing		Note-taking		Total	Mean
	add	Sub	add	sub	add	sub	add	sub	add	sub		
T1	7	2	18	14	12	4	9	2			68	6.8
T2	15	2	28	21	38	3	14				121	12.1
T3	16		34	20	30	3	12				115	11.5
T4	1		15	6	10		5		1		38	3.8
T5	5	1	19	14	26	2	13		3		83	8.3
T6	23	2	27	9	34	1	5	1	2		104	10.4
T7	3		17	9	4		9				42	4.2
T8	3	2	8	8	4	2	3	1		1	32	3.2
T9	3	1	14	17	8	1	2			2	48	4.8
P1	5	1	14	7	14	9	3	2	1		56	5.6
P2	2	2	11	17	20	7	4	1	1	9	74	7.4
P3	3	1	15	7	29	4	6	1			66	6.6
P4	8	2	24	7	32	3	24	3	1		104	10.4
P5	4	1	12	10	31	6	8		1		73	7.3

The non-parametric alternative of independent samples T-test, which is the Mann-Whitney U test, was used to compare the two groups' explicitation behavior based on their reasons.

Table 5. Mean Accuracy of the Two Groups' Explicitation Behavior.

Groups	N	<i>Reason-Based Explicitation Behavior</i>	
		Mean	SD
Experienced Group	9	84.6	8.02
Trainee Group	5	72.3	11.5

The results of the descriptive statistics of the two groups' performance indicated that the experienced group obtained a higher mean ( $M=84.6$ ) than the trainee group ( $M=72.3$ ).

Mean accuracy of the two groups' performance in each type of the reason are shown in Table 6. According to the table, the experienced group outperformed the trainee group in **clarifying** (experienced group,  $M= 31$  and trainee group,  $M=21.3$ ), **reinforcing** (experienced group,  $M= 10.4$  and trainee group,  $M=8.4$ ), and **note-taking** (experienced group,  $M= 2.6$  and trainee group,  $M=1$ ). However in **time-managing** (experienced group,  $M= 5.8$  and trainee group,  $M=9.5$ ) and **gap-filling** (experienced group,  $M= 24.8$  and trainee group,  $M=33.1$ ), the trainee group outperformed the experienced group.

Table 6. Mean Accuracy of the Groups' Performance in Each Category.

Explication Behavior	Groups			
	<i>Experienced Group</i>		<i>Trainee Group</i>	
Based on Motivation	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Time-managing	5.8	1.1	9.5	2.6
Gap-filling	24.8	1.9	33.1	4.07
Clarifying	31	2.6	21.3	4.7
Reinforcing	10.4	4.1	8.4	1.4
Note-taking	2.6	1.6	1	.37

The results of the Mann-Whitney U test conducted on the data didn't reveal a statistically significant difference among the two groups' performances,  $\chi^2(2, N = 14) = 20.5, p = .78$ .

According to Table 7, there was no significant difference between the performance of the two groups regarding their explication behavior based on reason.

Table 7. Results of the Mann-Whitney U Tests Conducted on the two groups'  
Explication Behavior Based on Reason

Explication Behavior Based on Reason	Results of the Mann-Whitney U Tests	
	Z	P
Time-managing	-.47	.63
Gap-filling	-1.4	.16
Clarifying	-1.1	.25
Reinforcing	-.06	.94
Note-taking	-.48	.62

## 5. Findings and Discussion

Regarding the initial question, the findings of the study showed the majority of the experienced interpreters used explication for clarification. According to retrospective interviews and notes, the experienced interpreters stated that their primary objective during interpretation was "providing listeners with a clear and straightforward interpretation." This finding yields comparable results with Tang (2016, 2018), who found that clarification was the most important reason in the works of experienced interpreters. In other words, experienced interpreters appeared to be listener-focused and attempted to facilitate comprehension for the audience.

With respect to the second question, the results revealed, compared to the experienced group, trainee interpreters primarily used explication for gap-filling. As the trainee interpreters pointed out in their retrospective interviews, they missed source information for two primary reasons namely note-taking and lack of knowledge. Therefore, explication was used to compensate for the missing information.

Considering the third question, there was no significant difference between the performance of the two groups regarding their explication behavior. The descriptive statistics, however, revealed that the experienced group had a higher mean score ( $M=84.6$ ) than the trainee group ( $M=72.2$ ).

Among experiential explication subcategories the experienced interpreters used all subcategories except participant-based explication (for gap-filling) mostly for clarification. But in contrast, trainee interpreters used all types of experiential explication for gap-filling. It showed that using explication is related to the

experience of the interpreter. Experienced interpreters made more explicitation to make the interpretation more transparent for the audience. The higher frequency of experiential explicitations for clarifying in the experienced group indicates that experienced interpreters are more listener-oriented and can make greater contributions in facilitating communication than their student counterparts in E-P CI. However, trainee interpreters added or substituted explicitations due to their lack of knowledge or their inability in note-taking and interpreting.

Regarding clarifying, among the subcategories of interpersonal explicitation, experienced interpreters made most explicitation in attitudinal-based explicitation subcategories. But for the trainee group, most of the explicitation in both engagement and attitudinal-based explicitation were for gap-filling. It also demonstrates that they tend to fill in the gap resulting from information loss with appraisal information that the speaker implies, while experienced interpreters rarely did so.

Within the subcategories of textual explicitation, both groups primarily employed explicitation for the sake of clarifying. By adding or substituting reference-based explicitation, filling ellipsis, and connectives, both parties were attempting to make the interpretation more comprehensible and consistent for the audiences. Consequently, it can be concluded that an experienced interpreter is more likely than a trainee interpreter to offer explicitations to aid the comprehension of listeners. This finding is in line with Liu et al.'s (2004) research result.

The experienced interpreters had a significantly higher mean in reinforcing than the trainee interpreters (Experienced group,  $M=10.4$ ; Trainee group,  $M=8.2$ ). This higher mean was caused by one of the experienced interpreters (EI 4), who had less experience than the other experts. During the interview, he stated, "when the speaker is emphasizing a certain point, the interpreter does not have the authority to dismiss it; he must convey that emphasis in his interpretation." Other experienced interpreters, whose work experience and familiarity with Trump's attitude were greater, emphasized meaning and message above reinforcement. However, in particular sections of interpretation, the experienced interpreters created certain reinforcements based on their prior knowledge.

Among all the interpersonal explicitations made for reinforcing the speaker's attitude, both experienced and student interpreters are featured with the addition of attitudinal intensifier. It implies that based on the graduation-based explicitation definition, both groups increased or decreased the degree of the speaker's attitude

or feeling in their interpretations, thereby reinforcing the meaning. Tang and Li (2016, p. 252) reached the same conclusion in their study, stating that "professional interpreters tend to emphasize the speaker's attitude more often than trainee interpreters."

The superior mean score achieved by the experienced interpreters, in comparison to the trainee interpreters, can be attributed to the efficacy of note-taking strategies (Experienced group,  $M= 2.6$ ; Trainee group,  $M=1$ ). For experienced interpreters, note-taking was a tool to help them in remembering the input during the interpretation. In other words, note-taking did not waste the experienced interpreters' time and required no additional cognitive effort on their part. For the trainee interpreters, however, taking notes was a barrier to understanding the entire concept. The trainees paid more attention to taking notes than to the interpreting task. To conclude, the synthesis of retrospective interview data and statistical analyses suggests that note-taking not only impeded the trainee interpreters' performance in rendering the source material but also adversely affected their conceptual understanding of the content.

The trainee group outperformed the experienced group in time-managing (Experienced group,  $M= 5.8$ ; Trainee group,  $M=9.5$ ). The highest number of explicitation for time-managing in the experienced group related to modifier-based explicitation subcategory, whereas for the student group, the major form is adding modifiers, process, circumstantial adjuncts, participants, and conjunctive adjuncts. There are two ways to interpret the results. First, the trainees in E-P CI encountered a greater number of interpretation challenges than the experienced interpreters. Second, the trainee interpreters tend to add implicit modifiers, circumstantial adjuncts, and conjunctive adjuncts due to insufficient time for processing information. The higher frequency of experiential and textual explicitations for time management in the trainee group means that more hesitations were found in their renditions. These hesitations according to Tommola and Heleva (1998, p. 185) "can greatly reduce the quality perceived by the listeners, and in some cases prevent accurate comprehension of the interpretation."

Although the performance of the experienced interpreters and the trainees differed in their use of explicitation subcategories and the rationale behind their choices, the current study yielded no significant difference between the performances of the two groups. Similar research with a bigger sample size could produce different results. Moreover, the present study explored the patterns of

explicitation in CI in the English-Persian language pair; future research may analyze this case in other language pairs.

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