

Exploring Challenges and Strategies in Interpretation Tasks among Thai EFL University Students at an International University

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Abstract

This research aims to study the influence of digital competency of accountants in Thai. Competent interpreters are essential for the rapid exchange of information across languages and cultures, facilitating effective communication among individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds. This study investigates the challenges faced by Thai EFL university students during interpreting tasks and explores the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges. The study included 34 English majors enrolled in English to Thai and Thai to English interpretation courses at an international university in central Thailand. The students were requested to videotape their interpreting tasks, watch their interpretations to recall their experiences, and write a reflective journal. Qualitative data were collected through students' reflections to address research questions regarding interpretation challenges and the strategies used to overcome them. Thematic analysis was employed to identify themes emerging from the data. The findings revealed that Thai students encountered various challenges in interpreting tasks, including vocabulary deficiency, intricate sentence structures, specialized terminology, idiomatic expressions, real-time pressure, fast-paced speech, and multiple accents. Additionally, the research identified eight strategies to overcome these challenges: paraphrasing, active listening, guessing meaning, asking for clarification, omitting, seeking help, using context clues, and maintaining composure under pressure to deal with interpretation challenges. Some implications for interpretation courses in EFL contexts are discussed briefly.

Keywords: Interpretation, interpreting challenges, interpreting strategies, Thai EFL students

1. Introduction

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requested to videotape their interpreting tasks, watch their interpretations to recall their experiences, and write a reflective journal. Qualitative data were collected through students' reflections to address research questions regarding interpretation challenges and the strategies used to overcome them. Thematic analysis was employed to identify themes emerging from the data. The findings revealed that Thai students encountered various challenges in interpreting tasks, including vocabulary deficiency, intricate sentence structures, specialized terminology, idiomatic expressions, real-time pressure, fast-paced speech, and multiple accents. Additionally, the research identified eight strategies to overcome these challenges: paraphrasing, active listening, guessing meaning, asking for clarification, omitting, seeking help, using context clues, and maintaining composure under pressure to deal with interpretation challenges. Some implications for interpretation courses in EFL contexts are discussed briefly.

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1. Introduction

In educational contexts, translators and interpreters play crucial roles in international collaborations, such as in academic conferences and bilateral meetings. Interpreters, often referred to as language mediators, verbally convey messages from one language to another (Murtiningsih & Ardillah, 2021). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the employment rate for translators and interpreters is projected to increase by up to 20 percent between 2021 and 2031, surpassing the average growth rate for all other occupations in the job market (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). However, becoming an efficient interpreter can be challenging because the role of an interpreter involves more than word-for-word translation. Interpreters must consider various significant aspects, including the conversation's topic, cultural nuances, negotiated terms, and complex terminology (Baranyai, 2011). Moreover, an interpreter's fluency and accuracy in message delivery are critical factors contributing to their overall quality (e.g., Rennert, 2010; Yenkimaleki, 2017; Yenkimaleki et al., 2023).

In real-life interpreting situations, interpreters frequently encounter various challenges and unexpected circumstances, including linguistic barriers resulting from limited vocabulary knowledge (Pratiwi, 2016; Baranyai, 2011), unfamiliar topics (Yenkimaleki et al., 2023), and the rapid speech pace of speakers (Hasanshahi & Shahrokhi, 2016). Individual interpreters must employ strategies to overcome these challenges effectively. Interpreters use several strategies when faced with these challenges, such as asking for clarification (Russell, 2005), seeking similar terms or synonyms in the target language (Dong et al., 2019), using body language or miming to enhance clarity (Murtiningsih & Ardillah, 2021), taking notes and decoding them with expressions (Arumi Ribas, 2012), or using a dictionary to resolve lexical term or phrase problems (Mokhtar et al., 2017). According to Li (2013), interpreters must address two sources of constraints during interpretation: "cognitive constraints," which involve factors like time pressure, attention span, and working conditions, and "language-specific constraints," which include syntactical and semantical differences. To effectively deal with cognitive and language-specific constraints, interpreters can employ segmentation (breaking down a speech or text into smaller, more manageable segments for interpretation), as suggested by studies like Donato (2003) and Lee (2007).

At the university where the researcher serves, two interpretation courses, specifically English to Thai and Thai to English, were introduced in the 2021 revised curriculum. These courses were designed for third and fourth-year English majors in the communication strand. Since their inclusion in the revised curriculum, these interpretation courses have been taught only twice. One of the requirements for students in these courses is that they must practice their interpreting skills in extracurricular activities, which may include church programs, events related to morality and ethics, outreach programs, devotional talks, student assemblies, and other community service projects. Given that these interpretation courses are new and compulsory for English majors in the 2021 revised curriculum, the researcher was motivated to investigate the challenges faced by Thai student interpreters and explored the strategies they employed to address these challenges. This study sought to determine whether common interpretation challenges, such as limited vocabulary knowledge (Pratiwi, 2016), cultural differences (Baranyai, 2011), unfamiliar topics (Yenkimaleki et al., 2023), and complex terminology (Baranyai, 2011), were applicable in the context of inexperienced student interpreters. The findings have the potential to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on interpretation (Murtiningsih & Ardlillah, 2021; Yenkimaleki et al., 2023), particularly within a diverse cultural setting. The research may also expand our understanding of interpretation in a multilingual environment where various English accents are encountered during cross-cultural communication. This could offer valuable guidelines for interpretation instructors in preparing student interpreters for effective cross-cultural communication (Yenkimaleki, 2017).

2. Literature Review

Becoming a proficient interpreter is a challenging task, especially for those with limited educational opportunities, unfamiliarity with various cultural backgrounds, and infrequent use of the target language in their daily lives. Interpreters often face significant challenges when performing their interpreting tasks, including time constraints and rapid speech rates. In this section, we will review previous studies that have addressed the challenges encountered during interpreting tasks and the strategies employed by student interpreters to overcome these difficulties.

Linguistic Knowledge

Pratiwi (2016) argued that students' inadequate linguistic resources, including vocabulary knowledge, could hinder them from effectively conveying the intended message. This argument finds support in Nurfauziyah's (2017) study, which revealed that interpreters often struggle to accurately convey messages due to their limited familiarity with vocabulary, terminology, or expressions in the target language. Milton (2010) explored studies concerning the role of vocabulary size in oral performance and suggested that vocabulary knowledge is crucial for both oral and aural competence. While spoken language relies on a smaller lexicon than written language. Thus, having a vocabulary of around 2,000 to 3,000 words can enhance L2 learners' oral production and communicative interactions, ultimately improving their interpretation skills. Some researchers, such as Nation and Nation (2001), propose that a vocabulary size of approximately 5,000 words is ideal for L2 learners, enabling them to understand most reading materials and engage effectively in educational dialogues. In comparison, educated native English speakers possess a vocabulary of around 20,000 word families, with an average annual increase of 1,000 word families during early life. Nation and

Nation (2001) emphasize the crucial significance of vocabulary in the process of acquiring language skills and proficiency. These researchers claimed that a robust vocabulary is essential for clear communication, adept interpretation, and a comprehensive understanding of language. It equips learners with the essential resources to actively participate in meaningful interactions within the language and its cultural contexts. Therefore, vocabulary development is a critical aspect of interpreter language proficiency, facilitating more fluent speech and accurate message conveyance in the target language. As Wilkins (1972) noted, “Without grammar, very little can be conveyed. Without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed” (p. 111).

Cultural Differences

It is widely recognized that language plays a pivotal role in the development and shaping of culture. Language allows us to convey meaning and facilitates cross-cultural communication. However, differences in culture and language can lead to miscommunication or misinterpretation, potentially resulting in negative attitudes and discrimination toward other cultures (Pujiyanti & Zuliani, 2014). What is considered acceptable or polite in one culture may be perceived as rude, unacceptable, or even taboo in another (Hinkel, 2001). Therefore, interpreters must gain an understanding of the target language and its associated cultural values to minimize misinterpretations. Khouni and Boudjelal (2019) emphasized that every utterance carries multiple meanings depending on the context and circumstances. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of culture is essential to interpret utterances accurately. Having sufficient knowledge of cultural norms and conventions within the target language, including formality levels and the use of non-verbal communication like gestures, facial expressions, eye contacts, and speaking pace, is crucial for interpreters.

Working Memory Capacity

Working memory is often described as a limited-capacity “brain system” responsible for temporarily storing and manipulating information required for complex cognitive activities such as comprehension, learning, and reasoning (Baddeley, 1992, p. 281). Given that interpreting tasks involve the real-time oral translation of spoken language, they place a significant demand on working memory capacity. This means interpreters must retain short-term memory of words or phrases and their meanings in the target languages (Cowan, 2000). Considering the vital role of working memory in interpreting tasks, one might expect interpreters to have a working memory advantage over non-interpreters (Signorelli et al., 2012). Language comprehension requires active access, maintenance, and processing of language inputs. Researchers, such as Daneman (1991) and Finardi and Prebianca (2006), have argued that L2 learners with larger working memory capacity tend to outperform their peers with lower spans in speaking activities, thanks to their greater efficiency in speech production processes. Similarly, efficient interpreters need better executive control over language inputs compared to their non-interpreting peers (Signorelli et al., 2012). This notion is supported by Davelaar et al. (2005), who found that interpreters might excel in handling response competition during the recall of statements from verbal working memory compared to their non-interpreting peers. During interpreting tasks, interpreters must exercise their ability to manage response competition when recalling lexical items from their verbal working memory. This requires

interpreters to focus their attention and comprehension on both phonological and semantic short-term memory (Signorelli et al., 2012).

Time Constraint

Interpreters have very limited time to convey utterances produced by the speaker into a different language. In contrast to written translation, interpreting messages comes with a significant temporal load (Gumul & Lida, 2007). Translators have ample time to find accurate terms for conveying textual messages in the best possible way. Interpreters face time constraints when converting oral messages at a rapid pace, which is perceived to be thirty times faster than that of text translation (Seleskovitch, 1978). Fugen et al. (2007) argued that interpreters need mere seconds to adapt to the target language and context to deliver an accurate interpreted message to the audience. This process necessitates interpreters to continuously monitor, store, and retrieve linguistic resources to produce the oral rendition in the target language. Such tasks demand cognitive operations and prompt interpreters to employ elaborate lexical or synthetic search strategies. As a result, some interpreters, especially inexperienced interpreters, tend to use fillers or repeat words, and they may not be able to complete entire segments during interpreting tasks due to time pressure (Murtiningsih & Ardlillah, 2021; Signorelli et al., 2012).

As reviewed above, researchers (e.g., Murtiningsih & Ardlillah, 2021; Nurfauziyah, 2017; Rennert, 2010; Yenkimaleki et al., 2023) posit that interpreters' language proficiency and cross-cultural competence are crucial factors in enhancing the quality of interpreting performance. However, not all interpreters perform flawlessly during their interpreting duties. Previous studies (e.g., Baranyai, 2011; Hasanshahi & Shahrokhi, 2016; Pratiwi, 2016; Yenkimaleki et al., 2023) have reported several challenges, such as linguistic barriers, cultural incompetence, unfamiliarity with content, and rapid speech from interlocutors. Given that the EFL learning context often has limited exposure to the target language (e.g., English), it is essential to explore the challenges and strategies of EFL student interpreters. This study attempted to explore the challenges encountered by students engaging in interpretation tasks and to examine the strategies they employ to address these challenges. The researcher anticipates that this study can contribute to the existing body of knowledge on interpretation in an EFL context where students serve as student interpreters. The study was guided by two research questions as follows:

1. What are the challenges students experience in interpreting tasks?
2. What are strategies employed by students to deal with interpretation challenges?

3. Research Methodology

This study was conducted at an international university in central Thailand. There are about 1,000 students from 32 different countries enrolled in various academic disciplines. In the study, the researcher employed a purposive sampling technique to select only Thai students majoring in the English language. This sampling method is perceived to be more effective with a small sample size and a homogenous population. Examining the data is advantageous for gathering qualitative response data as it enables the researcher to thoroughly analyze the information, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of the topic (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

3.1 Participants

The participants were 34 junior and senior English majors who enrolled in English-Thai and Thai-English interpretation classes for the 2023-2024 academic year. These participants were between 22 and 24 years old. Their English proficiency ranged from pre-intermediate to upper-intermediate level [comparable to levels A2 – B2 based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) scale], as reported by their TOEIC scores. All these participants are native Thai.

3.2 The Nature of Interpretation Courses

The Thai-English and English-Thai interpretation courses study the basic principles and theories of interpretation from Thai to English and vice versa across a variety of texts and topics. In weekly three-hour sessions, students focus on refining interpretation skills through interactive activities while also learning theoretical concepts. These activities include interpreting statements, extracting moral lessons from narratives, role-playing scenarios involving dialogues, children's stories, news reports, testimonies, tips for academic success, and messages of encouragement from YouTube. Engaging in these diverse exercises not only strengthens language comprehension but also hones the ability to convey nuanced meanings in different contexts. Extracurricular activities organized by the university require both languages, Thai and English. Students enrolled in Thai-English and English-Thai interpretation courses are requested to provide interpretation services for these programs.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection methods included students' reflective journals. The participants were asked to volunteer as interpreters in extracurricular activities attended by international students and organized by various departments, such as the university church programs, assemblies, chapels, departmental activities, dormitory worships, religious-related activities, volunteer camps, and other community service projects. The participants were required to perform consecutive interpretations twice, once from English to Thai and once from Thai to English. Each interpretation session should last 10-15 minutes, including the original speech. The projects contributed 15% of the final score for the interpretation courses. Students were requested to videotape their interpreting tasks, watch their interpretations to recall their experiences, and write a reflective journal about the challenges they faced while performing interpreting tasks and the strategies they used to handle the problems at that moment. Each student was required to write about the challenges they faced and the strategies they employed after completing their two interpretation projects, with an expected length of approximately 300-350 words. In total there were 34 reflective papers submitted by 34 students, amounting to a total word count of 10,370 words.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis utilized thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to examine categories that emerged from the qualitative data coding. The goal of the analysis was to examine the statements expressed by the participants to find out the challenges they encountered while interpreting different task types and the interpretation strategies they

employed to cope with those challenges. Thematic analysis was carried out through the six phases as presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Thematic Analysis Proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006)

3.5 Ethical Consideration

Ensuring ethical principles are adhered to is essential to safeguard both the researcher and the participants involved. A formal ethical approval document was obtained from the Research, Ranking, and Development Committee (RRDC) with the approval reference (RRDC 2023-72). The researcher took every precaution to prevent any potential harm to the participants and consistently prioritized their well-being. The participants provided informed consent after a comprehensive explanation of the consent form, ensuring their complete understanding of their participation before signing and engaging in the study. In maintaining participants’ anonymity, their names were encoded into numerical identifiers, preserving data confidentiality.

4. Research Findings

To address the first research question concerning challenges students experienced while engaging in interpreting tasks, the researcher performed coding according to the thematic analytic framework introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher adopted a model of the coding process in qualitative research proposed by Creswell (2012, p. 244). The coding process is illustrated in Figure 2.

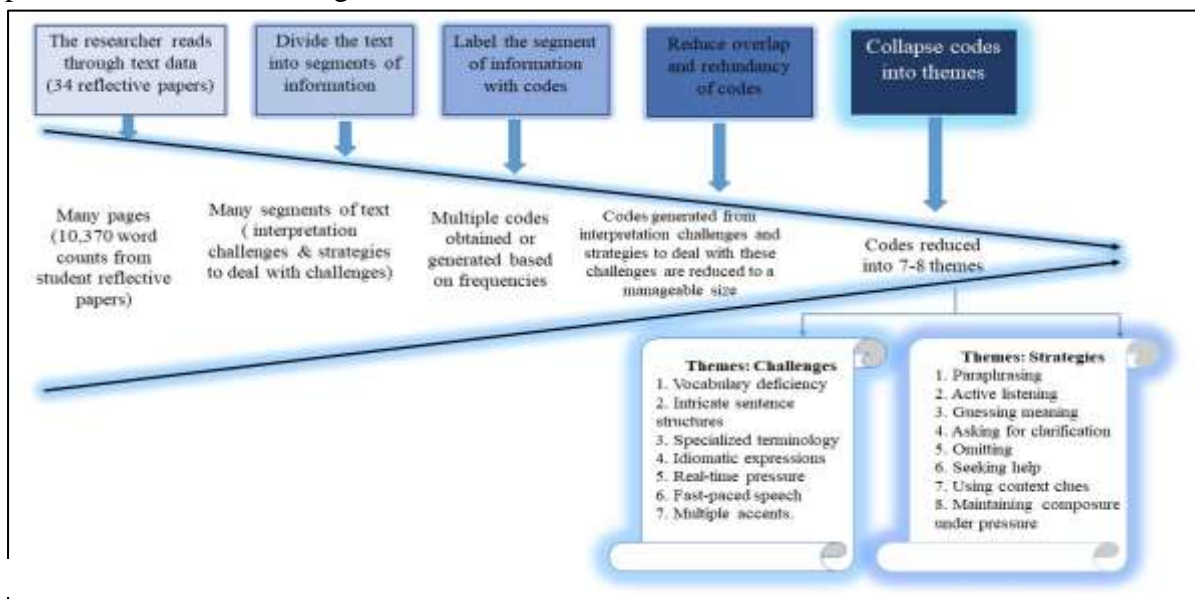


Figure 2. A model of the coding process in qualitative research

Through qualitative data analysis, seven distinct themes emerged, ranked from high to low frequency. The number in square brackets next to each theme represents the frequency of occurrence of the corresponding codes. Subsequently, these codes were further reviewed and defined, leading to the identification of the seven emerging themes: (1) Vocabulary Deficiency [85], (2) Intricate Sentence Structures [78], (3) Specialized Terminology [60], (4) Idiomatic Expression [52], (5) Real-Time Pressure [38], (6) Fast-Paced Speech [27], and (7) Multiple Accents [20].

Vocabulary Deficiency

Students may struggle to find appropriate equivalents for certain words or concepts, leading to gaps in the interpretation. This limitation can hinder their ability to fully grasp the nuances of the text and accurately convey its meaning. Moreover, it could impede effective communication, making it challenging for them to articulate their thoughts while engaging in interpretation tasks. Table 1 provides some examples to illustrate this theme.

Table 1. Vocabulary Deficiency

Theme 1: Vocabulary deficiency	Code	Informant's Code	Informant's Responses
	limited understanding of words and meanings	Informant # 1	"...My big challenge in interpretation tasks is a <u>limited understanding of words and meaning</u> , which can make me to interpret the statements wrongly when I wanted to convey the intended message from the speaker. This happened when I interpreted for my dormitory teacher..."
	don't know many words	Informant # 4	"...to be honest, I <u>don't know many words</u> in English, and this is a disadvantage for me, and I feel shy when I can't interpret the message for the speaker although I take English as my major in college..."
	short of vocabulary knowledge	Informant # 12	"...There was a time I <u>was short of vocabulary knowledge</u> when I helped my Chinese friend at the food court to buy food. The vender said "ใส่ปลาร้าไหม" I couldn't explain this Thai word to her. Later when I returned to the dorm, I checked this word and I learned that ปลาร้า is 'fermented fish' in English..."

Intricate Sentence Structures

Navigating complex sentence structures can be particularly demanding for students with limited language backgrounds, especially when dealing with languages known for their elaborate grammar rules. The intricacies of sentence formation, involving nuanced clauses, subordinating conjunctions, and syntactical arrangements, can pose significant hurdles to effective comprehension and expression. This is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Intricate Sentence Structures

Theme 2: Intricate sentence structures	Code	Informant's Code	Informant's Responses
	challenging to interpret	Informant # 3	"..I was once interpreting for the dormitory worship and the speaker gave me a figure with long English text under it, and that was <u>challenging to interpret</u> because the statement is long.."
	difficult to understand	Informant # 8	"...I remember when I was asked to interpret for my roommate at the branch Sabbath school, she gave me a long statement that was <u>difficult to understand</u> at first. I had to check with other friends nearby to tell me the meaning of that long statement..."

Specialized Terminology

Certain industries and academic fields may necessitate interpreting tasks that involve intricate and specialized terminology. This can pose challenges for interpreters, particularly those who have limited familiarity with the subject matter. Interpreting technical jargon and field-specific vocabulary demands a deep understanding of the concepts being discussed. Table 3 provides some examples of this theme.

Table 3. Specialized Terminology

Theme 3: Specialized terminology	Code	Informant's Code	Informant's Responses
	technical terms	Informant # 3	"...One time I took my Indonesian friend to the dam, the officer explained something to me in Thai using technical terms related to electric generator like ‘เครื่องกำเนิดไฟฟ้ากระแสตรงและกระแสสลับ’, which I could not understand this at all. I tried to keep quiet and avoid telling my partner. Later, I checked this out and it’s a direct-current generator (DC generator) and an alternating current generator (AC generator).."
	unfamiliar vocabulary	Informant # 20	"...I interpreted for a Thai church pastor to explain to church visitors about the church program on that day and the pastor used the word in Thai ‘เราจะมีพิธีถวายบุตร และต่อด้วยพิธีมหาสนิท’, These words are unfamiliar vocabulary to me, so I asked one church elder if he can explain this to the visitors. Now I learned these two words: child dedication and communion service..."

Idiomatic Expressions

Idiomatic expressions can present significant challenges for interpretation, particularly when bridging the gap between languages rooted in distinct cultural contexts. This theme arises from the recognition that interpreting these expressions accurately requires not only linguistic proficiency but also a deep understanding of the cultural nuances that underlie them. Table 4 provides some examples of this theme and its corresponding codes, accompanied by pertinent excerpts from students’ reflections.

Table 4. Idiomatic Expressions

Theme 4: Idiomatic expressions	Code	Informant’s Code	Informant’s Responses
dirt cheap		Informant # 5	“...I recalled an occasion when I was asked to assist an English language teacher in teaching an instructional session as part of the English Camp. During this session, the teacher used certain expressions such as “some shops downtowns are costly, while some charge customers really <u>dirt cheap</u> .” I well understand the meaning of “cheap,” but “dirt cheap” made me confused. “...At the student assembly I interpreted for an Indian student, and he said "you guys seem so quiet, so let's find games that help break the ice. I was stuck when I heard he said " <u>break the ice</u> " and I asked for clarification and he explained it in a simple work that it means to make someone feel less nervous
break the ice		Informant # 10	

These scenarios highlight the intricate interplay between language and culture in interpretation. Idiomatic expressions often carry unique connotations and cultural associations that may not directly translate, necessitating a more profound comprehension of the context in which they are used. Interpreters need to navigate such linguistic intricacies sensitively and emphasize the significance of equipping them with the cultural insight required for accurate communication.

Real-Time Pressure

Working in real-time situations, such as live broadcasts or international events, places interpretation students, especially those with limited language backgrounds under intense pressure. The need to instantaneously process and convey information accurately can lead to heightened stress levels. The pressure to deliver interpretations quickly while maintaining precision and clarity adds an additional layer of complexity. Table 5 provides a comprehensive presentation of this theme.

Table 5. Real-Time Pressure

Theme 5: Real-Time Pressure	Code	Informant’s Code	Informant’s Responses
getting more anxious and worried		Informant # 20	“...I recalled my interpretation experiences during live broadcasts in children’s story time when I helped an Indonesian teacher, I was <u>getting more anxious and worried</u> of making mistakes when I saw church audience watching me and the media team was videotaping the program for online viewers...”
feel nervous		Informant # 24	“...As I am a kind of shy person when I stand in front of many people, impromptu interpretations really made me <u>feel nervous</u> for I can make

mistakes or get stuck when I do not know typical terms or expressions...”

Fast-Paced Speech

Rapid speech delivery poses a substantial challenge for interpretation students, particularly those who are still gaining experience in the field. When speakers talk quickly, it becomes difficult to catch every detail, which leads to the possibility of missing essential information. Table 6 provides an overview of this theme.

Table 6. Fast-Paced Speech

Theme 6: Fast-paced speech	Code	Informant’s Code	Informant’s Responses
	Speak too fast	Informant # 2	“...The challenge I face when doing my interpretation tasks is when the speaker <u>speaks too fast</u> , requiring me to process and convey the information immediately while at the same time attempting to maintain accurate messages from his original statement. This happened when I helped in a children’s story time on Saturday afternoon. ...”
	quick to catch up	Informant# 15	“...I remember that during the dormitory worship session one evening, I had to be <u>quick to catch up</u> with the talk from the dormitory dean in order to provide accurate interpretation for students who may not understand English well enough...”

Multiple Accents

Interpretation students encounter challenges due to diverse accents, which result in differences in pronunciation, intonation, and speech patterns. Interpreters must possess a keen ear for these variations and a deep understanding of regional linguistic norms. Table 7 provides an overview of this theme.

Table 7. Multiple Accents

Theme 7: Multiple accents	Code	Informant’s Code	Informant’s Responses
	not familiar with his accent	Informant # 19	“...I remember during the SC announcements at the sports event, I was asked to interpret for our SC club officer from South Africa, he spoke English fluently which I was <u>not familiar with his accent</u> . I was a little embarrassed to ask for help from the audience who could understand the message to explain that again to me...”
	strong accent	Informant # 21	“...My challenge in interpretation is a speaker speaks with <u>strange accent</u> , not sound like English as I use to hear. It happened to me once when I helped in the community service project when I had to interpret for a Filipino staff...”

In addressing the second research question concerning students’ strategies for handling interpretation challenges, the researcher employed a coding process akin to that used for the first research question. Throughout the qualitative data analysis, eight distinct themes emerged, arranged in descending order based on their frequency of occurrence. The number in square brackets next to each theme represents the frequency of occurrence of the corresponding codes. These codes were further reviewed and defined, leading to the identification of the eight emerging themes: (1) paraphrasing [75], (2) active listening [68], (3) guessing meaning [59], (4) asking for clarification [48], (5) omitting [37], (6) seeking help [31], (7) using context clues [28], and (8) maintaining composure under pressure [22].

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing occurs in interpretation tasks to convey the original message using different words or expressions while maintaining the intended meaning. Paraphrasing allows interpreters to clarify complex or ambiguous statements by rephrasing them in simpler terms. This helps ensure that the message is understood by the audience. Table 8 offers an overview of this theme.

Table 8. Paraphrasing

Theme 1: Paraphrasing	Code	Informant's Code	Informant's Responses
	simplify his message	Informant # 11	“..I ask the speaker to <u>simplify his message</u> in a simple language when I don't understand it...”
	summarize the message in easy language	Informant # 24	“ ...I ask help from the speaker to <u>summarize the message in easy language</u> when I get stuck on the job I was asked to do ...”

Active Listening

Active listening is a crucial skill for interpreters, as well as for effective communication in general. It involves fully concentrating, understanding, responding, and remembering what is being said. Active listening enables interpreters to accurately interpret messages, understand context, clarify information, and reduce errors, all of which contribute to effective communication between parties speaking different languages. Table 9 provides an overview of Theme 2: active listening.

Table 9. Active Listening

Theme 2: Active listening	Code	Informant's Code	Informant's Responses
	pay close attention	Informant # 5	“..For me to deal with challenges while doing an interpreting task , I need to <u>pay close attention</u> to the speaker and listening to him carefully.”
	stay conscious all the time	Informant # 12	“...As an interpreter we need to make sure we <u>stay conscious all the time</u> while performing our duty...”

Guessing meaning

On some occasions, interpreters may encounter unfamiliar words, idiomatic expressions, or technical terms. Since they do not have time to look up every unfamiliar term in real-time interpretation, guessing meaning based on the context of the conversation or the topic being discussed can help them to maintain the flow of interpreting tasks. Table 10 provides some examples of this theme.

Table 10. Guessing Meaning

Theme 3: Guessing meaning	Code	Informant's Code	Informant's Responses
	assume the meaning of words	Informant # 6	"...When I meet challenges during my interpretation, I sometimes <u>assume the meaning of words</u> from the sound I heard..."
	unsure of words	Informant # 28	"...There are times I am unsure of words while on the stage next to the speaker, so I simply guess those statements without asking the speaker..."

Asking for Clarification

Interpreters ask for clarification during interpreting tasks to ensure accuracy and effective communication. This need arises from various factors. For example, the speaker uses ambiguous language or idiomatic expression, or technical terminology that requires clarification to convey the precise meaning. By asking for clarification, interpreters ensure that the message is faithfully conveyed, reducing the risk of misunderstandings. Table 11 provides an overview of this theme.

Table 11. Asking for Clarification

Theme 4: Asking for clarification	Code	Informant's Code	Informant's Responses
	speaking too quickly	Informant # 11	"..One time when the speaker <u>speaking too quickly</u> when I helped in the dormitory worship, I asked her to explain it again because I could not follow..."
	unclear message	Informant # 22	"...It is necessary for me to double check with the speaker when I hear unclear message and you can't just guess ..."

Omitting

Interpreters may omit interpreting parts of the message when faced with a heavy cognitive load to manage time constraints, conserve cognitive resources, maintain coherence, and reduce errors in interpretation. It is a strategy employed to balance the demands of real-time interpretation while ensuring the accuracy and clarity of the conveyed message. Table 12 offers an overview of this theme.

Table 12. Omitting

Theme 5: Omitting	Code	Informant's Code	Informant's Responses
	fail to interpret	Informant # 18	"...I <u>fail to interpret</u> some parts when I can't comprehend the message from the speaker, especially the fast speaker..."
	miss some parts	Informant # 26	"...It's common that we can't understand everything while working on a interpreting task, so I sometimes <u>miss some parts</u> of the message ..."

Seeking Help

Interpreters seek help from their audience to ensure accuracy. Language nuances and cultural context can be complex, and a second perspective can help identify potential errors or misunderstandings. At the same time, interpreters can benefit from constructive criticism to refine their skills. Seeking help from the audience serves to acknowledge the importance of the audience's perspective in achieving successful communication. Table 13 offers some examples of this theme.

Table 13. Seeking Help

Theme 6: Seeking help	Code	Informant's Code	Informant's Responses
	request help from friends	Informant # 18	"...A few times when I worked on my interpretation tasks being assigned, I need to request help from friends when I get through expressions that I did not understand..."
	get help from listeners	Informant # 26	"...I feel ashamed that I need to get help from listeners who understand English better than I when doing my interpretations..."

Using context clues

When spoken language is unclear due to factors like mumbling, background noise, or technical disruptions, interpreters may employ context to reconstruct the speaker’s intended message. Understanding the broader context of the conversation helps them make sense of ambiguous or distorted speech. Table 14 provides some examples of this theme.

Table 14. Using context clues

Theme 7: Using context clues	Code	Informant's Code	Informant's Responses
	figure out the meaning from story	Informant # 22	"...My simple way of dealing with problems in interpretation is I figure out the meaning from the story without pausing to ask for help ..."
	hint of information	Informant # 29	"...Some phrases aren't comprehensible to me when I translate, but I use a hint of information to guess..."

Maintaining composure under pressure

Inexperienced interpreters may experience nervousness or anxiety in challenging situations, which can hinder their effective interpretation. Staying calm enables them to manage their emotions, reduce anxiety, and stay focused on the task at hand, thereby enhancing their interpreting abilities. Table 15 provides an overview of this theme.

Table 15. Maintaining Composure under Pressure

Theme 8: Maintaining composure under pressure	Code	Informant's Code	Informant's Responses
	tried to calm myself	Informant # 21	"..The moment I couldn't catch up and follow the speaker, I <u>tried to calm myself</u> to concentrate more what to say next..."
	remain quiet	Informant # 27	"...As a person without experience, I admit that I <u>remain quiet</u> when I did not know what to translate because it could prevent me from making mistakes..."

In the present study, seven emerging themes were identified, representing challenges encountered by student interpreters in interpretation tasks, as well as eight emerging themes depicting strategies employed to address these challenges. Importantly, some of these themes are consistent with findings reported in previous studies. They are summarized in Table 16.

Table 16. Summary of Themes for Interpretation Challenges and Strategies to Address Them

Themes for Challenges in Interpretation	Themes Reported in Previous Studies	Strategies to Deal with Interpretation Challenges	Themes Reported in Previous Studies
1. Vocabulary deficiency	Banranyai (2011); Pratiwi (2016); Nurfauziyah (2017)	1. Paraphrasing	Donato (2003); Dong et al. (2019)
2. Intricate sentence structures (<i>new</i>)		2. Active listening (<i>new</i>)	
3. Specialized terminology	Baranyai (2011); Yenkimaleki et al. (2023)	3. Guessing meaning	Arumi Ribas (2012)
4. Idiomatic expression	Arumi Ribas (2012); Murtiningsih and Ardlillah (2021)	4. Asking for clarification	Russell (2005)
5. Real-time pressure (<i>new</i>)		5. Omitting	Donota (2003); Pratiwi (2016); Dong et al. (2019)
6. Fast-paced speech	Hasanshahi and Shahrokhi (2016)	6. Seeking help	Murtiningsih and Ardlillah (2021)
7. Multiple accents (<i>new</i>)		7. Using context clues (<i>new</i>)	
		8. Maintaining composure under pressure	Russell (2005); Li (2013)

5. Discussion

The research findings shed light on the challenges faced by student interpreters, providing valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of interpretation tasks. Through thematic analysis, the study identified seven distinct themes that encapsulate the difficulties encountered by students during interpretation tasks. First, vocabulary deficiency emerged as a prominent challenge. Moreover, interpreting often involves specialized topics in various subjects. Interpreters need specialized vocabulary to accurately convey concepts within each field. Without it, they may struggle to understand or translate complex terminology. As evidenced by informant # 4 in Table 1 who stated, “I don’t know many words in English, and this is a disadvantage for me”. Pratiwi’s (2016) study also found evidence of the common stumbling block posed by the lack of vocabulary knowledge for interpreters.

Intricate sentence structures present another hurdle. Navigating complex grammatical rules, clauses, and subordinating conjunctions can be particularly demanding for students with limited L2 language backgrounds. This challenge is exemplified by Informant #8’s experience (see Table 2), who stated, “My roommate...gave me a long statement that was difficult to understand.” This difficulty suggests that the complexity of sentences encountered during interpretation tasks can pose significant challenges for student interpreters, especially those with limited proficiency in the target language.

Idioms often have figurative meanings that cannot be understood from the literal meanings of their individual words. Without exposure to idiomatic expressions and their contexts, student interpreters may struggle to interpret them accurately. This challenge is exemplified by Informant #10’s experience (see Table 4), who stated, “I was stuck when I heard he said ‘break the ice’ and I asked for clarification.” This difficulty highlights how idiomatic expressions can pose significant hurdles for student interpreters, particularly when they lack familiarity with the idioms commonly used in the target language.

In addition to idiomatic expressions challenge, other factors contribute to the complexity of interpretation tasks, as highlighted by previous studies. For example, Arumi Ribas (2012) and Murtiningsih and Ardillah (2021) have documented various hurdles faced by interpreters, including pressure and rapid speech. The present study found similar challenges, as evidenced by Informant #24 (see Table 5), who expressed feeling nervous during interpretations, particularly when addressing a large audience, citing the potential for making mistakes under pressure. This sentiment underscores the psychological strain that real-time interpretation can impose on interpreters, impacting their confidence and performance. Similarly, Informant #2 identified the challenge of processing and conveying information quickly when speakers deliver their messages at a rapid pace (see Table 6). This highlights the cognitive demands placed on interpreters to maintain accuracy and coherence (Finardi & Prebianca, 2006; Signorelli et al., 2012) amidst fast-paced speech.

In the present study, it was observed that students encountered multiple accents from diverse speakers, some of which were unfamiliar to them. This phenomenon can be attributed to the diverse student body at the university, which comprises over 30 nationalities. Consequently, student interpreters are exposed to a wide range of English accents while carrying out their interpretation tasks. We must acknowledge that in a real-world setting, interpreters often work with speakers from diverse nationalities and linguistic backgrounds, each with their unique English accents.

In the analysis of strategies employed to address interpretation challenges, eight strategies emerged among the participants. These strategies encompass paraphrasing, active listening, guessing meaning, asking for clarification, omitting, seeking help, using context clues, and maintaining composure under pressure. Notably, some of these strategies are akin to those documented by Russell (2005), who observed that L2 students, while engaged in interpretation tasks, often sought to clarify unclear words or phrases by asking the speaker. Additionally, these student interpreters in the current study reached out to peers with a better understanding of the language for assistance, as also noted by Murtiningsih and Ardillah (2021). Sometimes, these student interpreters faced challenges related to their vocabulary knowledge in the target language. This limitation may lead to difficulties in finding precise terms to convey the speaker's message accurately. In such instances, they employed strategies like omission or paraphrasing to address these vocabulary constraints. For example, Informant # 26 stated "It's common that we can't understand everything...so I sometimes miss some parts of the message" (see Table 12) and "I ask help from the speaker to summarize the message in easy language" (see Table 8, Informant # 24). These findings align with previous research, as discussed in studies by Donato (2003), Pratiwi (2016), and Dong et al. (2019). These studies also observed that interpreters, when encountering unfamiliar terms, commonly chose to omit, seek near synonyms, or opt for paraphrasing in the target language. In the present study, participants reported employing guessing and contextual cues when they did not fully understand the speaker's message. These student interpreters strategically employ these techniques to bridge gaps stemming from unfamiliar words or expressions, thus maintaining a flow of conversation. For example, Informant # 29 stated "Some phrases aren't comprehensible...but I use a hint of information to guess" (see Table 14) and "I figure out the meaning from the story without pausing to ask" (Informant # 22). These findings are consistent with Arumi Ribas's (2012) study, which highlights that interpreters occasionally resort to educated guesses based on contextual cues and common sense, even though such interpretations may not always perfectly align with the precise intended meaning of the speaker. Nevertheless, some student interpreters opted to maintain their composure when confronted with anxiety or nervousness under pressure. For example, Informant # 21 said "The moment I couldn't catch up...I tried to calm myself" (See Table 15) and "I remain quiet when I did not know what to translate" (Informant # 27). As suggested by Russell (2005) and Li (2013), anxiety can significantly impact interpreter performance, and maintaining composure serves as a valuable strategy for stress management, allowing interpreters to regain concentration and carry on with their tasks.

Volunteering to interpret extra-curricular activities at the university gives students a distinct chance to connect theoretical knowledge with real-world practice. The challenges emphasized in the study, such as vocabulary deficiency, intricate sentence structures, specialized terminology, idiomatic expressions, real-time pressure, fast-paced speech, and multiple accents. Through involvement in extra-curricular events, students can apply acquired strategies, like paraphrasing, active listening, guessing meaning, asking for clarification, omitting, seeking help, using context clues, and maintaining composure under pressure to deal with interpretation challenges. Interacting with speakers from various backgrounds and dealing with specialized terms in real-time stimulates their adaptive skills. Although these activities

present challenges, they serve as a valuable learning experience for overcoming vocabulary limitations and dealing with the unpredictability of live communication.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research offers a comprehensive exploration of the challenges student interpreters face, delving into the intricacies of interpretation tasks. Seven distinct themes emerged, highlighting issues such as vocabulary deficiency, intricate sentence structures, specialized terminology, idiomatic expression, real-time pressure, fast-paced speech, and multiple accents. Additionally, the study investigated the strategies employed by student interpreters to surmount these challenges. Paraphrasing, active listening, guessing meaning, asking for clarification, omitting, seeking help, using context clues, and maintaining composure under pressure emerged as key strategies. Knowing the challenges and strategies of student interpreters not only enhances them with training opportunities; but also highlights the adaptability and resilience of the interpreting profession in the future. In an increasingly interconnected world, where effective cross-cultural communication is of paramount importance, the role of interpreters becomes more critical than ever. This research serves as a valuable resource for interpreter training, offering insights into interpretation intricacies and diverse problem-solving strategies. It emphasizes the necessity of continuous support and skill development for interpreters as they embark on interpreting careers. Moreover, the multifaceted world of interpretation uncovered in this study sheds light on future research in the field related to interpretation in EFL contexts. Exploring additional aspects, such as the impact of emerging technologies on interpretation or the role of interpreters in diplomatic and international settings, can further enrich our understanding of this vital profession. As interpreters continue to bridge linguistic and cultural divides, fostering more effective cross-cultural communication, they remain essential contributors to global communication and mutual understanding.

7. Implications

Some implications can be drawn from the study. The first implication deals with curriculum development. The identification of challenges, such as vocabulary deficiency, intricate sentence structures, specialized terminology, and idiomatic expression, suggests the need for a well-rounded curriculum that explicitly addresses these language complexities. Designing courses with targeted modules on cultural intricacies, vocabulary building, and handling rapid speech pace can better prepare students for the demands of interpretation tasks.

The second implication is training strategies. The revealed strategies employed by the participants, including paraphrasing, active listening, guessing meaning, asking for clarification, omitting, seeking help, using context clues, and maintaining composure under pressure, provide insights for training programs. Incorporating these strategies into training sessions can enhance students' adaptive skills and stress management, fostering resilience in the face of challenges encountered while performing interpreting tasks.

Lastly, considering the exposure to multiple accents due to the diverse student body, interpreter training should include components that enhance awareness and proficiency in dealing with various English accents. Simulated exercises or real-world exposure to diverse

linguistic backgrounds can better prepare interpreters for the globalized nature of their future work environments.

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