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## **SHADOWING AS A METHODOLOGY IN INTERPRETER TRAINING: TECHNIQUES AND COGNITIVE BENEFITS**

**Annotation:** This article explains that shadowing is an effective method for building skills essential for simultaneous interpretation. Defined as repeating a message word for word as it is heard through headphones, shadowing has roots in cognitive psychology, particularly in studies on selective attention. It is primarily used to train beginners in interpreting, helping them to listen and speak simultaneously in their native language (A language) before they progress to interpreting from a foreign language (B language) into their native tongue.

**Key words:** Shadowing, Simultaneous Interpretation, Interpreter Training, Cognitive Psychology, Phonemic Shadowing, Phrase Shadowing, Listening and Speaking Simultaneously, Interpreter Methodology, Speech Perception.

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Shadowing, a technique used in simultaneous interpreter training, involves the immediate repetition of spoken words as they are heard, typically through headphones. This method, which has its origins in cognitive psychology, was initially employed in studies on speech perception and selective attention, notably by researchers like Cherry (1953). Over time, shadowing evolved into a foundational exercise for training interpreters, helping them develop the ability to listen and speak at the same time.

The primary goal of shadowing in interpreter training is to enhance a trainee's capacity to process and reproduce speech simultaneously in their native language (A language) before progressing to interpreting from a foreign language (B language) into their mother tongue. By starting with shadowing exercises, interpreter trainees build the core skills required for effective and fluent simultaneous interpretation.

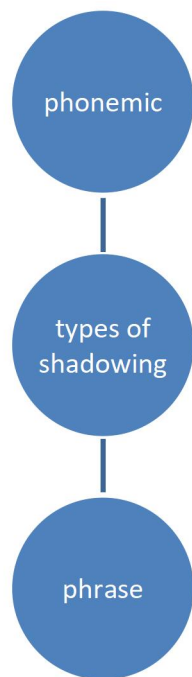
Shadowing is an essential component of interpreter training, particularly for beginners who need to develop the skill of listening and speaking simultaneously. This process, often referred to as "dual-tasking," by Gual is crucial for interpreters to manage the cognitive load of processing speech while simultaneously reproducing it. Without mastering these foundational skills, interpreters may develop ineffective habits such as pausing excessively during the speaker's vocalization and compensating during moments of silence. This behavior often results in a choppy and uneven delivery, which affects the clarity and coherence of the interpretation.

Research indicates that shadowing can enhance both cognitive and linguistic skills. For instance, Lambert explains that shadowing exercises are designed to increase an interpreter's ability to manage time delays between hearing a message and reproducing it, also known as the "ear-voice span." This ability is crucial in real-time interpretation, where interpreters often need to manage a short delay to form and express meaning units while simultaneously listening to new information.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chernov, G. V. (1994). *Message Redundancy and Simultaneous Interpretation*. John Benjamins.

Also there are types of shadowing that are clearly defined and explained. Cognitive psychologists and interpreter trainers have identified two primary types of shadowing used in training: phonemic shadowing and phrase shadowing. Each serves a specific function in preparing interpreters for the demands of simultaneous interpretation.<sup>2</sup>



Picture 1.1. The types of shadowing.

### **Phonemic Shadowing**

Phonemic shadowing involves repeating each sound or syllable immediately as it is heard, without waiting for a complete word or phrase.<sup>3</sup> This exercise focuses on developing the mechanical skill of simultaneous listening and speaking, which is foundational for interpreting tasks. Phonemic shadowing is typically the first exercise introduced to interpreter trainees to assess their ability to synchronize these dual tasks across both their A and B languages.<sup>4</sup>

### **Phrase Shadowing**

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<sup>2</sup> Lambert, S. (1988). “Shadowing.” In *Conference Interpreting: Practice and Training*. University of Ottawa Press.

<sup>3</sup>Marslen-Wilson, W. D. (1973). “Speech Shadowing and Speech Comprehension.” *Nature*, 244, 522-523.

<sup>4</sup> Lambert, S. (1989). *Training Interpreters: Techniques and Practice*. University of Ottawa Press.

Phrase shadowing, which usually follows phonemic shadowing in training programs, requires trainees to repeat phrases after a brief delay—often around 250 milliseconds or more. This technique is essential for helping interpreters manage the ear-voice span effectively and organize their thoughts to convey meaning units, much like in real-time simultaneous interpretation.<sup>5</sup> By practicing phrase shadowing, trainees learn to manage time delays and maintain fluency and coherence while interpreting.

In interpreter training programs, shadowing exercises are designed to be progressive, beginning with simpler tasks and gradually increasing in complexity. This structured approach allows trainees to develop the necessary skills incrementally, ensuring that they gain confidence in managing the simultaneous listening and speaking required for interpreting.

### **Initial Stages: Phonemic Shadowing**

The initial phase of training focuses on phonemic shadowing, where students are encouraged to repeat sounds exactly as they hear them, with minimal delay. This exercise assesses whether trainees can synchronize their listening and vocalizing abilities without the cognitive burden of translating or interpreting content. According to Gile (2009), phonemic shadowing helps trainees become comfortable with the mechanical aspects of interpretation, such as articulation speed and accuracy, which are critical for success in the booth.

Lambert highlights that the effectiveness of phonemic shadowing is not only in training the mechanics of dual-task processing but also in building a trainee's ability to focus under pressure. As trainees become accustomed to phonemic shadowing, they gain confidence in their ability to handle speech input and output simultaneously, which is essential for the next phase of training: phrase shadowing.

### **Advanced Stages: Phrase Shadowing**

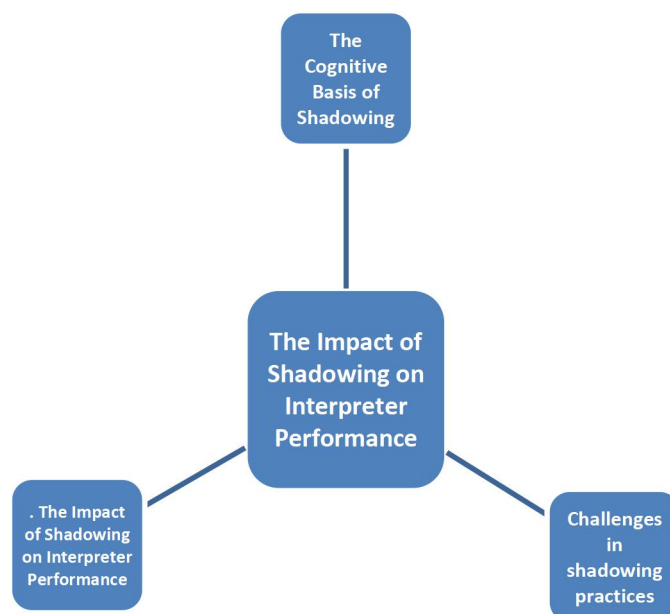
Once trainees demonstrate proficiency in phonemic shadowing, they progress to phrase shadowing exercises. Phrase shadowing requires repeating longer segments of speech with a slight delay, allowing trainees to work on processing entire units of meaning rather than individual sounds or syllables. This technique, as explained by Marslen-Wilson (1975), mimics the real-time demands of simultaneous interpretation, where interpreters must quickly comprehend, retain, and reproduce chunks of information.

In phrase shadowing exercises, trainees are expected to lag behind the speaker by 250 milliseconds or more. This delay enables them to focus on understanding the message rather than just repeating the sounds. Chernov (1994) notes that this shift is critical for interpreters, as it trains them to organize their output into coherent segments that mirror the logical structure of the original message. Such skills are vital for maintaining fluency and clarity during actual interpreting sessions.

Although it is known for its advantages in the educational places, there are some key points we should consider:

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<sup>5</sup> Gile, D. (2009). *Basic Concepts and Models for Interpreter and Translator Training*. John Benjamins.



Picture 1.2. The key points in shadowing

### **Challenges in shadowing practices**

Despite the benefits, shadowing presents challenges, particularly for trainees working with their B language or a weaker language. Studies by Rosenberg and Lambert have shown that even those who consider themselves proficient in two languages may struggle during shadowing exercises, often omitting words or failing to maintain fluency in 1974. These difficulties arise primarily because shadowing requires not only linguistic competence but also an ability to simultaneously process and reproduce information in real-time.

Gile emphasizes that shadowing exercises must be carefully monitored by instructors to identify areas where trainees face difficulties in 1995. These observations allow instructors to tailor their feedback and provide targeted practice to address specific weaknesses, such as vocabulary retention or articulation speed in the B language. Moreover, incorporating additional exercises that focus on improving cognitive load management can enhance a trainee's performance in both shadowing and actual interpreting scenarios.

### **The Cognitive Basis of Shadowing**

Shadowing is not just a linguistic exercise; it engages complex cognitive processes essential for successful interpreting. Cognitive psychologists have studied shadowing to understand how the brain processes simultaneous listening and speaking tasks. Marslen-Wilson and Cherry demonstrated that individuals vary in their ability to shadow effectively, suggesting that some cognitive abilities, like working memory capacity and attention control, may influence a person's potential to excel as a simultaneous interpreter.

Phonemic shadowing, for instance, tests the interpreter's ability to hold sounds temporarily in working memory while producing speech, a critical component of simultaneous interpretation.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, phrase shadowing places additional demands on the interpreter's cognitive system, as it requires the integration of meaning, syntax, and context within a short timeframe. Gile (2009) notes that training programs utilizing shadowing exercises should incorporate techniques that enhance these cognitive abilities, such as exercises focusing on memory expansion and attention management.

### **The Impact of Shadowing on Interpreter Performance**

Empirical studies show that shadowing exercises positively affect interpreter performance, especially when incorporated into the early stages of training. Chernov (1994) points out that shadowing helps trainees develop resilience to cognitive overload, a common challenge during simultaneous interpretation. By practicing shadowing under controlled conditions, interpreters can build the cognitive stamina needed to manage the intense demands of live interpreting sessions.

Marslen-Wilson's (1975) research supports the idea that shadowing at short latencies can be predictive of an individual's ability to handle the rapid processing speed required in interpretation. Individuals who excel in these exercises often show better performance during more complex tasks, such as interpreting between languages with differing syntactic structures.

### **Implications for Interpreter Training Curriculum**

The use of shadowing in interpreter training programs has proven to be an effective method for developing the fundamental skills needed for successful interpretation. It allows instructors to evaluate trainees' capabilities and identify areas where further development is needed. Programs that employ a structured approach, starting with phonemic shadowing and gradually moving to phrase shadowing, provide a comprehensive training framework that aligns with the cognitive and linguistic demands of simultaneous interpretation.<sup>7</sup>

Shadowing should be integrated into interpreter training curricula as an essential component for building both foundational and advanced interpreting skills. Additionally, further research should explore optimizing these exercises to accommodate individual differences in cognitive ability and language proficiency. By refining shadowing techniques, interpreter training programs can more effectively prepare trainees for the complexities of real-world interpreting.

Shadowing remains a critical technique in simultaneous interpreter training, allowing trainees to develop the skills necessary for effective interpretation. From phonemic to phrase shadowing, these exercises build interpreters' cognitive and linguistic capabilities, helping them manage the dual-task demands of listening and speaking simultaneously. By understanding and utilizing shadowing techniques, interpreter training programs can better prepare interpreters for the challenges they will face in their professional practice.

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