
Article 4

Expertise without Deliberate Practice?

THE CASE OF SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETERS

Elisabet Tiselius

Department of Foreign Languages,
University of Bergen
Centre for Research on Bilingualism,
Stockholm University

Abstract

Deliberate practice (Ericsson 2007) is a type of focused, goal-oriented practice that is part of the process of developing expertise. A less explored area in interpreting research, deliberate practice is a construct that is not easily investigated using an experimental research design.

This article reports on in-depth interviews with three interpreters. By exploring their background, training, views on interpreting, and perceptions of core areas of deliberate practice (such as practice, setting clear goals and being open to feedback), an impression of their practice habits emerges. The article concludes that deliberate practice as defined by Ericsson is not consciously employed by these interpreters. Some of the implications of these findings for the application of expertise theory in interpreting are outlined in the discussion.

1. Introduction

The expertise approach was introduced to interpreting studies in the late 1990s. Several important publications on expertise in interpreting appeared around 2000, such as Ivanova (1999), Ericsson (2000), Moser-Mercer (2000), Moser-Mercer et al. (2000) and Liu (2001). Most research into expertise in interpreting has been done on conference interpreting, in particular simultaneous interpreting. The expertise theory originates from psychology (Ericsson & Smith 1991) and argues that the reason for experts outperforming other performers in their field is a combination of various characteristics. Expertise is thus not just a result of

talent or aptitude, but years of extended practice involving a combination of different tactics for acquiring, developing and maintaining a specific skill. These characteristics (which include but are not restricted to “long experience in the task domain”, “regular outstanding performance”, “access to expert knowledge when needed”, “deliberate practice”, “clear goals” and “openness to feedback”) are common among expert performers regardless of field. The first three characteristics can be observed to a greater or lesser degree by the researcher, whereas the latter three cannot.

The findings reported in this article result from in-depth interviews with three conference interpreters, hereafter referred to as the informants. The aim of the interviews was to investigate their personal and professional backgrounds as well as their views on their profession, preparation, practice and goals. The rationale for doing this was to approach the more elusive concepts of deliberate practice, clear goals and openness to feedback.

2. Background

Deliberate practice is a particular type of practice, summarised by Horn and Masunaga (2007: 601) as “focused, programmatic, carried out over extended periods of time, guided by conscious performance monitoring, evaluated by analyses of level of expertise reached, identification of errors, and procedures directed at eliminating errors.” According to Ericsson, “the core assumption of deliberate practice is that expert performance is acquired gradually and that effective improvement of performance requires the opportunity to find suitable training tasks that the performer can master sequentially” (Ericsson 2007: 692). Deliberate practice is crucial for achieving levels of expertise in a domain. Ericsson et al. (1993: 368) divide any activity into three parts: work, play and deliberate practice. Work is defined as performing in public and often also for remuneration, play is defined as an enjoyable activity without any particular goal and deliberate practice is defined as an activity that includes processes designed to improve the current level of performance. Ericsson et al. also suggest that deliberate practice can be used to discern experts from other performers.

An important part of deliberate practice is having clear goals. The performer must be able to specify intentions, results or outcomes. Research in goal-setting has shown that performers perform better if they are able to specify detailed goals or can break a goal down into different sub-objectives (Zimmerman 2007).

Experts are open to feedback, whether from coaches, trainers, colleagues or the performer’s own results. Being open to feedback helps the performer to evaluate performance, improve performance and set new goals (Horn & Masunaga 2007: 601).

Deliberate practice as described above can materialize during training or education, and also when the performer steps out into the professional world. In expertise theory, a performer is not an expert when he or she graduates from school or a training programme. Budding experts continue to refine their skills by deliberate practice.

Studies of interpreting expertise have typically studied the performance of highly skilled interpreters and compared the features of their performance to that of less experienced interpreters (see for instance Ivanova (1999); Liu (2001); Köpke & Nespoulous (2006); Vik-Tuovinen (2006)). This type of design favours measurable aspects of expertise, such as “outstanding performance” or “access to

expert knowledge when needed”, but is less suitable for studying different aspects of “deliberate practice”, “clear goals” and “openness to feedback”.

Few, if any, studies of expertise in interpreting have used qualitative methods, although researchers in other fields have made use of qualitative methods when studying the expertise theory. For example, Sosniak (2007) reviewed different studies using retrospective interviews (i.e. dealing with events that occurred a long time ago, such as in childhood or adolescence) to study how expertise developed. Deakin et al. (2007) used diaries in studies of time management in practice and its links to expertise. Sosniak reported that habits of deliberate practice were formed during childhood, while Deakin et al. found that experts practise more and with a higher intensity than other performers.

Interpreting is made up of skills and sub-skills. The primary skill is the elusive interpreting skill, and sub-skills include language knowledge (both foreign and mother tongue), general knowledge (popularly referred to in interpreting as “culture générale”), communicative skills (i.e. analysing, speaking, presenting and voice), concentration, memory and the ability to deal with stress. Many more skills can be added to this list. In a literature survey on aptitude testing, Russo (2011: 13) identified three specific areas: a) language knowledge and cognitive skills, such as general mental ability, general and culturally specific knowledge, ideational fluency, verbal and associative fluency and working memory; b) interpreting-related skills that can be acquired, such as simultaneous note-taking and simultaneous transfer; and c) personality traits. When students acquire these skills, Moser-Mercer says that they “develop flexible understanding of when, where, why, and how to use their declarative and procedural knowledge to solve new problems” (2008: 13).

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The three informants in this study were all female who grew up in Sweden with Swedish as their mother tongue. After graduating from the same interpreting programme, they became staff interpreters for various European institutions, where they have been active for the past fifteen years. The interview study was a complement to a larger longitudinal project¹², and the three participants were recruited on basis of their early recordings as well as their professional success. They were regarded “good interpreters” by their colleagues. They had experience from teaching and peer reviewing of other interpreters. On the basis of their previous experience both on and off task, it was assumed that they would have developed expertise. They were also willing to participate both in new recordings as well as in-interviews, which in turn indicate willingness to expose themselves both to scrutiny and in-depth reflection. The participants were informed of what their participation implied and signed a form of informed consent.

¹² Presented in its entirety in Tiselius and Jensen (2011).

3.2 Procedure for conducting the in-depth interviews

The in-depth interviews lasted between an hour and ninety minutes and were conducted in an unstructured way following a map of topics; Koskinen (2008) used a similar method in her study of translators in the European Union (see Kaijser & Öhlander 1999 for a thorough description of the use of unstructured interviews). These interviews were structured insofar as both parties agreed that an interview was to take place and they set time aside for it. In all other respects they were unstructured in order to be as free as possible. Traditional definitions of an interview are also applicable, for example that an interview is a form of communication where one person recounts something and answers another person's questions, and the material is recorded in some way (Fägerberg 1999: 55). Quinn-Patton (2002: 342) refers to this type of interview as informal conversational, defining it as the most open-ended approach to interviewing and the type that offers maximum flexibility to "pursue information in whatever direction appears to be appropriate" (2002: 342). Quinn-Patton stresses that unstructured does not mean unfocused and that such interviews should rather be highly focused.

For the purpose of this study, an interview model was developed by means of discussions, mind maps, a pilot interview and pilot focus group interviews. On the basis of early discussions with research colleagues and pilot studies, different areas of interest were identified, the main ones being "deliberate practice", "clear goals" and "feedback". Concepts relating to these areas were identified in the preparation phase. The focus group study (Tiselius 2010) showed that expertise concepts like "deliberate practice", "clear goals" and "openness to feedback" were not clearly perceived by those taking part in that study. These different characteristics of expertise were ranked below concepts like "render a complete interpreting" or "not change the information in the message" (Tiselius 2010: 12–13). From the discussions in the focus groups, it was also clear that the participants did not really understand the concepts¹³. The experiences from this focus group study helped to create a more open interview form with which to investigate the three core areas in question.

3.2.1 Identification of topics and core phenomena

This section presents the topics and core areas that were included in the interview mind map (see figure 1, below) and the reasons for including them. *Childhood and teenage dreams and goals* were included because studies in expertise show that expert characteristics are present during childhood (see above Sosniak 2007). *Learning languages* is a sub-skill of interpreting, but strategies for learning languages reveal practice habits, goals and so forth. *Experiences from the interpreting programme* were included because interpreting skills (e.g. consecutive and simultaneous interpreting) are taught at interpreting programmes, along with different sub-skills such as preparation, practice or terminology work, and habits promoting expertise. *Testing*, that is, interpreters'

¹³ Deliberate practice was perceived as only practice of the interpreting skill, in the booth in front of a microphone. No consensus was achieved of what a goal would be, and it was concluded in the focus group that the concept was unclear. Openness to feedback was also dismissed as unclear.

attitudes to tests and being tested, reveals their approach to goal setting, practice habits or relations to colleagues. *Practice* and *preparation* are logical starting points for discussions about deliberate practice. *Colleagues*, *listeners* and *clients* provide feedback that the participants could be more or less open to.

The above topics and core areas were included in the interview mind map, which then served as the basis for the questions in the more structured yet unmoderated focus group study mentioned above. After being tested in a pilot interview, the mind map was furthermore used as a road map for the interview. Using a mind map rather than already formulated questions entails that the informants are not necessarily asked exactly the same question, because many of the questions are guided by the answers; since the same concepts were covered, however, the questions were more or less the same for all three respondents. For the purpose of this article, the mind map and its concepts are presented in figure 1 below.

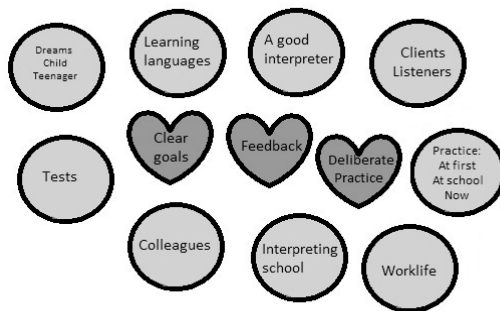


Figure 1. Thematic sketch of topics covered in the in-depth interviews. The heart-shaped themes reflect the focal points of the study.

3.2.2 The interview setting

The interviews were conducted at the informants' workplaces. It should be mentioned that the author of this article is a colleague of the informants. As Fägerborg (1999) points out, the role of the interview leader in an ethnographic in-depth interview is that of a discussion partner, that is, the interview is co-constructed by the interviewer and the interviewee. The implications for such an interview can be that the participants are less honest when discussing difficult topics, such as mistakes, tests or relationships with colleagues. Answers may be formulated with the intent of making an impression on their peer (me) or hiding weaker aspects; these mechanisms may even be unconscious. Moreover, as in all interviews, the informant is aware that the material will be used for a certain purpose and thus has the power to choose what to say or not to say in this situation. All this has to be taken into consideration when analysing the collected data. The informants in this study were candid in their responses, however, and did not shy away from difficult topics. In my experience, if a trustworthy atmosphere is created, honesty and openness will follow.

3.3 Coding and analyses of the interview data

The recorded interviews were fully transcribed and analysed. The analysis took its starting point in the various skills and sub-skills considered to be crucial for interpreting. All the occurrences that had any bearing on the identified skills, topics and core concepts were coded. The skills that were discussed with the interpreters were used as indicators of deliberate practice, goal setting or openness to feedback. For example, even though all the respondents explicitly stated that they did not use deliberate practice, they did give examples of practices such as the following: “It’s normal – if you’re just hanging around waiting, you can always go and listen to your colleagues, and for instance reflect about what makes that interpreter so pleasant to listen to.”¹⁴ Instances like this were classified as supporting the different core areas or skills. In the above cited case, it was classified as supporting deliberate practice, in accordance with Ericsson’s (2000: 214) claim that listening to or studying the performance of highly experienced peers helps to improve your own performance. It should be pointed out that the interpreter’s perception of practice and the construct of deliberate practice as it is explored in this study is not necessarily the same thing. Therefore, the many instances that are classified as deliberate practice by the researcher may not be regarded as practice by the interpreter.

In order to capture other narratives, topics or tendencies that may have arisen in the interviews, the interview transcripts were re-read together with another research colleague.

4. Qualitative Sides of Expertise

This section presents the analyses of the various topics discussed in the interviews. Fictitious names (Filippa, Ingrid and Gabriella) have been used in order to protect the identities of the informants.

4.1 Language learning and language knowledge

Contrary to the common belief that interpreters grow up bilingually, the three informants grew up in monocultural and monolingual environments and did not focus on language learning early on in life, although this had clearly not affected their ability to interpret well. Ingrid was the only one to display an early desire to communicate in other languages, as she tried to learn different languages with dictionaries as her only sources of reference. Ingrid also recalled how her dad used to say that what he remembered from her middle school years and throughout secondary school was “a murmur from my room when I read texts and glossaries aloud”. In contrast, Gabriella was focused on natural sciences, and only decided to study languages when she was in her twenties, after having gained a university degree. Filippa started secondary school by studying the natural sciences, but then switched tracks during secondary school and focused more on languages. The common denominator for the three participants was that when they did decide to learn a language, they focused intently on the language learning task. Ingrid studied an additional fourth language on her own in

¹⁴ All the quotations have been translated from Swedish to English by the researcher.

secondary school. Both Filippa and Gabriella went abroad soon after starting their language studies, for longer periods of time to study their chosen language at University.

At the interpreting programme all three informants experienced the need to improve their mother tongue and not “merely” learn foreign languages. In Gabriella’s words, “my focus had been on learning foreign languages and now I suddenly felt that I had to learn Swedish”.

The language profiles of the informants differ with respect to the age at which they began their active work with L2. They started acquiring their L2 past the critical age, in fact for two of them, this is a process which began in early adolescence. However, once they became interested in languages, they pursued their studies with unusual dedication and focus, seeking different opportunities to enrich their knowledge of both foreign and native languages.

4.2 General knowledge

All the informants talked about improving their general knowledge, albeit not in those exact words. Filippa said that when she left secondary school, “the idea was to get a complete, general foundation that I would then be able to do anything with – whatever that might be”. All the informants said that at the interpreting programme they read newspapers, listened to the radio and watched TV in new ways, both in their mother tongue and in their foreign languages. Gabriella added that when she talked about reading in general, it meant that “I read differently than I would do otherwise [i.e. if not an interpreter], it’s not like reading in a deckchair” (meaning that reading much more focused).

The informants were all curious and well informed about world events. They also considered curiosity and general knowledge to be necessary for being a good interpreter. When Filippa talked about general interpreting abilities, she mentioned “a general curiosity and openness, striving to always absorb everything and a genuine desire to understand everything”. When Ingrid talked about what made a good interpreter, she mentioned “intellectual curiosity, general knowledge and fast thinking”.

4.3 Communicative skills

Filippa said that “interpreting is very personal depending on who you are – we all have our personal way of expressing ourselves, and when [we started to work] we were able to listen to experienced interpreters who worked differently, but who were all equally good, and that was very useful”. The informants listened to their colleagues interpreting when they worked together in order to improve their own communication skills, which included good formulations, solutions and terminology use. Ingrid’s statement summed this up well:

I listen because I may have to help out with a word or maybe something else, or maybe even take over, it happens sometimes. Sometimes I listen because it’s a pleasure to listen, and it’s a joy to hear how somebody solves a tricky situation, and I also try to – even if I don’t think that you can just assimilate somebody else’s system – get inspiration for different solutions.

Gabriella emphasized the interpreter’s communicative relationship to clients and listeners in particular. Ingrid and Filippa, on the other hand, stressed the importance of being understood when interpreting no matter who was at the other end of the headphones. Although Gabriella initially stated that she did not

have a relationship with her listeners, she went on to say that she almost had a crush on everyone who made contact with the interpreters, for example by waving or smiling to them in the booth or just saying thank you. While she stressed that interpreters at the European Parliament are primarily there to provide a service, she felt it was a great boost to discover that “our service is used, they listen to us”, or to hear a client say, “Oh, it’s you again, that’s great!”

4.4 Focus

In their responses, all three respondents came across as being focused when young, although in different fields. Filippa had focused on sport and spent most of her youth practising and competing at a high level, at high school she studied natural sciences. Gabriella had specialized in the natural sciences too, and in middle school she had forced her parents to find out how she should prepare for secondary school and university in order to work in this field. Ingrid had a particular interest in learning languages, sometimes with a dictionary as her only support. The common denominator here is not their initial field of interest, but rather the intensity of the interest.

Another striking similarity is that although the informants were determined and had clear goals with regard to sports, hobbies or school results, as children or young adults they had no clear goals or visions about their future, and they had little idea about what to study after leaving secondary school. Even after obtaining a university degree, their future profession was not obvious.

Focus, in this section, has been approached from a macro perspective, goal focus in life. It can also be approached from a micro perspective, meaning the ability to focus on task. At the micro level, as is also indicated in section 3.5, the informants talk about being good at concentrating on the task, in the here and now.

4.5 Coping with stress

Interpreting can be both psychologically and cognitively stressful, and an inability to cope with stress will have a significant impact on one’s interpreting skills. Interestingly, none of the informants talked about particular types of stress management or learning to deal with stress, although all three seem to cope positively with stress.

An area in which coping with stress was discussed was test situations. Interpreting tests are stressful, because the candidate has to interpret one or several unprepared speeches in front of an examination board, often with five or more assessors present. The informants approached tests differently. Filippa said that she had “a very good ability to concentrate and be present in what I do”. Gabriella said that she did what she was told to do, namely, “pass the test”. Ingrid stressed the importance of routines for test preparation and not “over-preparing”. Filippa also said that tests were good because several people listened to the performance and gave the interpreter feedback.

Ingrid also talked about the demands and stresses of the interpreting programme, which according to her “were of a different nature; it felt like you were inside your brain and tampered with it much more [than in traditional university training]”. This intuitive impression of the learning process of interpreting gets support in the results in the brain imaging study of Hervais-Adelman et al. (2011) which found indications of change in the bilingual brain of interpreters.

4.6 *The interpreting skill*

The question of whether interpreting is an innate or an acquired skill has been discussed by both researchers and interpreters (see for instance Mackintosh 1999). All the informants claimed that the ability to interpret had a certain innateness to it, and they considered their profession to be close to their nature or personality. Ingrid explained this as follows: “And then I believe there is a certain factor X, as there is in all recipes, you can use some of this, this and that, and then there is something, that little extra, which is also needed and which cannot be defined”. To some extent this may have a bearing on how the informants viewed the need for practice.

If they consider the interpreting skill to be innate to a certain extent, they may not need to practise the main skill, so that practising their sub-skills would suffice. However, Ingrid also talked about improving her interpreting skill: “I also believe that to continue to add new languages is also a way to improve. Because I believe that if I master more languages, then I can disconnect from the original languages in some way. That it forces the actual interpreting process to be stronger.” Ingrid made the connection between the sub-skill (language learning) and the main skill (interpreting). During the interview she returned to the skill of interpreting when talking about interpreting programme and how they were taught and how to teach interpreting:

Because I think that this process – and I have to say that I’m not even sure it can be taught, I have not made up my mind yet – but this process – well, I suppose that everyone can develop a certain skill – but what makes it really come to life has probably to do with aptitude. Because [the development] of this process cannot be rushed.

This was not unique to Ingrid, with all three informants talking about “an X factor”, “something innate” or “a particular skill”.

They all said that they practised consecutive interpreting (although more as a tool for language learning rather than actually improving the consecutive skill) when preparing for a test with a new language. Gabriella was the only one who said anything about practising an interpreting skill. She said that “I still do à vistas (interpreting from a written text) when I discover a good text, or feel that I have to hammer in some terms, not every week, but maybe twice a month”.

The finding that the informants did not practise the interpreting skill is supported by Leis’ (2003) conclusions from her questionnaire study on self-assessment and self-evaluation among trained and un-trained Estonian interpreters. Her study showed that trained interpreters prioritized improving sub-skills such as language learning or background knowledge over refining the interpreting skill.

5. Deliberate practice, clear goals and openness to feedback

The informants seemed to have been highly focused from an early age on areas that interested them: sport for Filippa, language learning for Ingrid and science for Gabriella. They all mentioned setting goals and the importance of practice when talking about their childhood activities. Ever since childhood the informants took time to prepare and practise, although none of them explicitly defined this as deliberate. The determination displayed in mastering different

skills since childhood characterized how they now mastered the various skills necessary for interpreting.

With regard to interpreter training, they all mentioned different types of practice, although they did not specifically state that they practised their main skill. Without being taught to do so, and without regarding it as practice, they talked about different types of activities performed regularly under practice-like conditions, such as Filippa's newspaper reading or Gabriella's radio listening. But they did not seem to consciously or even unconsciously practise in a way that could be defined as deliberate in terms of Ericsson's definition. They simply did not engage in activities outside the actual interpreting activity (work in Ericsson's words) that were solely aimed at improving their interpreting skills (contrast this with how for example athletes, singers, actors or chess players regularly practise, i.e. with time set aside for practise, with a precise goal for the practise session, often with a coach and so forth). When they talked about practice, they all said that they did not practise per se, that is, they did not practise their main skills in consecutive and simultaneous interpreting. But they did all talk about reading plenty of newspapers and listening to the radio, which indicated that they do practise sub-skills.

On the other hand, they talked about how they struggled to improve and how their improvement was rewarding. Ingrid labelled herself as a perfectionist and said that she always tried to improve herself, and that her worst professional nightmare would be to discover that she was working on autopilot. Filippa said that

it's a kick. For me, it's particularly when I really understand, for instance, a strange line of reasoning, and I manage to sort it out, then I get a huge kick. Both because it's my job, which is the only important thing really, but also for me personally, when everything falls into place, I'm in harmony, it's a very physical experience.

Ingrid said:

There are days when I am better, when I strain every nerve, and then it's very rewarding when I feel that my performance is better. It feels good in my whole body. It's harmony, it's more like I create order in the chaos of universe.

Getting a perceived physical reward from producing good interpreting creates a virtuous circle. This feeling of producing high-quality interpreting is self-perpetuating, in that the interpreter is motivated to perform better and spend more time on the task.

In the case of clear goals, the informants all said that the most important goal in every interpreting situation was to understand and be understood. It should be stressed that the goals mentioned here are task goals, i.e. what to achieve while on task, and not training goals, i.e. goals related to structuring practise in order to improve performance. Before the discussion about goals arose, Ingrid repeatedly mentioned that she constantly tried to perform better because she was never totally satisfied and always had a desire to improve her performance. Ingrid also said about goals that "there is no absolute goal, but that is also something that is satisfying, that you will never get there". Gabriella, who practised by doing an *à vista* interpreting, set goals like reading most of the *Economist* and similar sub-skill goals. Filippa said that when she started working she did not use all her languages, but broke the work down into different part-time goals, mastering one

language at a time. The goals the informants talked about did not necessarily pertain to improving the interpreting skill but the different sub-skills, such as learning or improving languages, because these are the areas that are publicly rewarded.

For the informants, feedback came from evaluating themselves according to their own standards or from listening to their colleagues' performances, rather than from receiving comments on their performances from colleagues. This finding aligns with that of Leis (2003), who found that Estonian conference interpreters evaluated themselves according to their own standards learned in interpreting training, rather than from clients' feedback (in that case possibly a lower standard). In terms of deliberate practice in expertise theory, however, openness to feedback from peers and trainers is a tool that the informants only partially made use of. In their view, listening to highly experienced peers was beneficial for improving their own performance (Ericsson 2000: 214).

6. Discussion and Conclusions

The interviews analysed in this article constitute a case study on deliberate practice. They represent an enquiry into the practises engaged in by three interpreters, which places emphasis on exploring in depth their perception about interpreting, and the process where by they have acquired and perfected their skill. The analysis highlights interesting findings, which emerge from the informants' stories that align with findings in other studies.

Many superficial indicators suggest that the informants in this study fulfil the criteria of experts as defined by expertise theory, for example that they have long experience and have passed challenging accreditation and qualification exams. But experts are also defined by other qualities, including deliberate practice and the activities linked to such practice. Deliberate practice is not easily or immediately investigated in fields lacking obvious needs or incentives for improving the main skill. For employed interpreters at larger institutions, a personal physical positive reward (cf. the quotes in section 5) may be the only reward available, especially as there is little hope of higher remuneration, prizes or other recognition. Staff interpreters at larger institutions do not get a pay increase for producing better interpretations than their colleagues, there are no prizes for outstanding interpreters or interpretations, and outstanding simultaneous skills do not automatically lead to promotion. Instead, it is additional languages or administrative skills that have the potential to increase a staff interpreter's salary. Freelance interpreters could theoretically get more jobs if their interpreting skills are outstanding, which may in itself be an incentive for practising the skill. But for freelance interpreters who are accredited to the European institutions and who are placed in the highest quality category, the only criteria that matter for recruitment are geographical distance and number of languages. There is not much incentive here for continued refinement of the interpreting skill. Interpreters cannot be compared with translators in this area, because several different translation awards are available.

This does not mean that interpreters are not interested in improving their performance. On the contrary, the in-depth interviews reported here show that although the respondents had not been taught deliberate practice, they did make use of deliberate practice strategies to improve their sub-skills. They also seem to have made use of these strategies at a young age. But whether this can be defined

as deliberate practice as it has been defined by Ericsson et. al. (2007) is open to discussion, especially as none of the informants participated in activities in order to improve their main interpreting skill.

The in-depth interviews have showed, however, that these interpreters engage in (although unconsciously) deliberate practice strategies. They practice their language skills and strive to enhance their general knowledge, they actively learn from their peers by listening to them. Moreover, they also consider at least some part of the interpreting skill as innate, or dependent on an x-factor. This view of the interpreting skill may have effects on practise, which did not come up in the interviews. Presumably an innate skill would need less practise than an acquired one. However, the fact that the participants engage in so many other practice activities argues, at least partly against that argument.

The narratives that emerged during the interviews formed a uniform pattern. As the informants came from similar backgrounds, were more or less the same age, attended the same interpreting programme, had similar language combinations and the same professional backgrounds, it is fair to assume that they shared the same norms and the same professional habitus. Their stories nevertheless say something about their interpreting expertise. From a superficial perspective they are highly experienced interpreters who have reached the highest levels of the interpreting profession, and are regularly evaluated by their superiors. Nevertheless, they are unable to make more money, win competitions or become famous by improving their interpreting skills. From their narratives it is clear that their goals to perform better, or at a level that was acceptable to them, revolved around their own personal ranking or pride and no one else's. They were also convinced that the interpreting skill was mostly innate. In other words, there was scant external or internal incentive that could motivate them to engage in deliberate practice with clear goals and regular feedback from colleagues in order to improve their main skill of interpreting.

The above conclusion might not be valid for interpreters who aim towards passing accreditation tests for larger institutions, as they may well have an incentive to improve their interpreting skills. But if this conclusion proves to be true for the *crème de la crème* of the interpreting community, it will have implications for the application of expertise theory in interpreting. The definition of experts in interpreting research is very varied (see Liu 2008). Findings in this study indicate that experienced interpreters do not engage in deliberate practice the same way as other professions. If this is case, the theoretical framework will need to be adapted both in terms of how an expert is identified and also in terms of how the expertise concept of deliberate practice can be applied to interpreting research.

The findings of this study raise the following questions: Is it possible to be an expert without deliberately practising the main skill? Would it be enough to refine one's sub-skills? Is expertise theory still applicable to interpreting studies? In order to answer these questions, more studies of simultaneous interpreters' deliberate practice must be conducted.

References

- Deakin, J. M., Côté, J. and Harvey, A. S. 2007. "Time, budgets, diaries, and analyses of concurrent practice activities." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, K. A. Ericsson, N. F. P. J. Charness and R. R. Hoffman (eds), 303–318. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ericsson, K. A. 2000. "Expertise in interpreting: An expert-performance perspective." *Interpreting* 5 (2): 187–220.
- Ericsson, K. A. 2007. "The influence of experience and deliberate practice on the development of superior expert performance." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, K. A. Ericsson, N. F. P. J. Charness and R. R. Hoffman (eds), 683–703. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ericsson, K. A., Krampe, R. T. and Tesch-Römer, C. 1993. "The role of deliberate practice in the acquisition of expert performance" *Psychological Review* 100 (3), 363–406.
- Ericsson, K. A. and Smith, J. 1991. *Toward a general theory of expertise: Prospects and limits*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fägerborg, E. 1999. "Intervjuer." In *Etnologiskt fältarbete*, L. Kaijser and M. Öhlander (eds), 55–72. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Hervais-Adelman, A. G., Moser-Mercer, B. and Golestani, N. 2011. "Executive control of language in the bilingual brain: integrating the evidence from neuroimaging to neuropsychology." *Frontiers in Psychology* 2. Retrieved from <http://www.frontiersin.org/Cognition/10.3389/fpsyg.2011.00234/full>.
- Horn, J. and Masunaga, H. 2007. "A merging theory of expertise and intelligence." In *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, K. A. Ericsson, N. F. P. J. Charness and R. R. Hoffman (eds), 587–611. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ivanova, A. 1999. "Discourse processing during simultaneous interpreting: An expertise approach." (Doctoral dissertation, University of Cambridge, UK.)
- Kaijser, L. and Öhlander, M. (eds). 1999. *Etnologiskt fältarbete*, Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Koskinen, K. 2008. *Translating Institutions: An Ethnographic Study of EU Translation*. Manchester and Kinderhook: St. Jerome.
- Köpke, B. and Nespoulous, J.-L. 2006. "Working memory performance in expert and novice interpreters." *Interpreting* 8 (1), 1–23.
- Leis, Ü. 2003. "Tõlkide elukestev õpe Eestis – olukorra ja vajaduste võrdlev analüüs." (Master's thesis, University of Tartu, Estonia.)
- Liu, M. 2001. "Expertise in simultaneous interpreting: A working memory analysis." (Doctoral dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, USA.)
- . 2008. "How do experts interpret? Implications from research in Interpreting Studies and cognitive science." In *Efforts and Models in Interpreting and Translation Research. A Tribute to Daniel Gile* [Benjamins Translation Library: Vol. 80], G. Hansen, A. Chesterman and

- H. Gerzymisch-Arbogast (eds), 159–178. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Mackintosh, J. 1999. “Interpreters are made not born.” *Interpreting* 4 (1); 67–80.
- Moser-Mercer, B. 2000. “The rocky road to expertise in interpreting: Eliciting knowledge from learners.” In *Translationswissenschaft*, M. Kadric, K. Kaindl and F. Pöchlhammer (eds), 339–352. Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag.
- Moser-Mercer, B. 2008. “Skill acquisition in interpreting: A human performance perspective.” *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer* 2 (1): 1–28.
- Moser-Mercer, B., Fraunfelder, U. H., Casado, B. and Künzli, A. 2000. “Searching to define expertise in interpreting.” In *Language Processing and Simultaneous Interpreting: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, B. Englund Dimitrova and K. Hyltenstam (eds), 1–21. Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins.
- Patton, M. Q. 2002. *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks and London: Sage.
- Russo, M. 2011. “Aptitude testing over the years.” *Interpreting* 13 (1): 5–30.
- Sosniak, L. A. 2007. “Retrospective interviews in the study of expertise and expert performance.” In *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, K. A. Ericsson, N. F. P. J. Charness and R. R. Hoffman (eds), 287–30. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tiselius, E. 2010. “A sociological perspective on expertise in conference interpreting: A case study on Swedish conference interpreters.” In *Translation Effects: Selected Papers of the CETRA Research Seminar in Translation Studies 2009*, O. Azadibougar (ed.). Leuven: KU Leuven.
- Tiselius, E. and Jensen, G. B. 2011. “Process and product in simultaneous interpreting: What they tell us about experience and expertise.” In *Methods and Strategies of Process Research: Integrative Approaches in Translation Studies*, C. Alvstad, A. Hild and E. Tiselius (eds), 269–300. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Vik-Tuovinen, G.-V. 2006. “Tolkning på olika nivåer av professionalitet.” (Doctoral dissertation, University of Vaasa, Finland).
- Zimmerman, B. J. 2007. “Development and adaptation of expertise: The role of self-regulatory processes and beliefs.” In *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, K. A. Ericsson, N. F. P. J. Charness and R. R. Hoffman (eds), 705–722. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.