



Conference Interpreters' Perceptions of the Importance of Extra-linguistic Context in Arabic-English and English-Arabic Simultaneous Interpreting

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Abstract

Extra-linguistic context has been widely regarded as an essential part of successful simultaneous interpreting, which allows interpreters not only to decode linguistic content of a message but also to understand the speaker's intended meaning in a wider communicative context. Although previous studies have studied the effect of the contextual knowledge on interpreting competence, little research has been done to explore how the context interacts with the directionality of simultaneous interpreting from and into Arabic and English languages. The current study is aimed at studying interpreters' perceptions of the role of the extra-linguistic context in interpreting from and into Arabic and English and at finding out whether the contribution of the contextual knowledge is different with respect to the target language. The current study has used the method of quantitative survey research to study interpreters' perceptions of the role of the extra-linguistic context in interpreting from and into Arabic and English. The data were collected from 107 professional bidirectional Arabic-English conference interpreters. This quantitative study employed a structured questionnaire analyzed with descriptive statistics and paired-samples t-tests in SPSS. The results show that interpreters consider extra-linguistic context to be essential for the success of simultaneous interpretation irrespective of the direction of interpretation. It was found out that extra-linguistic context enables the interpreter to predict the upcoming information, comprehend the intentions of the speaker better, helps to understand culturally loaded expressions, makes it easier to recall terminology, and saves cognitive resources. A statistical analysis also shows a significant difference in the perceived importance of extra-linguistic context in Arabic-English vs. English-Arabic interpretations.

1. Introduction

Interpreting has been interpreted for a long time as the transfer of meaning from one language to another. In fact, it is much more complex and involves cognitive and communicative processes where the interpreter has to decode the utterance in the language of the speaker and interpret it according to the target language while also taking into consideration the pragmatic, cultural and situational aspects of any communication process. Researchers in interpreting studies have noted that the linguistic signal is only a part of the meaning participants may receive in the communication process. Much of the remaining meaning can be found in what Setton (1999) terms the "extra-linguistic situation of communication", including the non-linguistic behaviour, shared cultural knowledge, situational context, and the paralinguistic properties of the speaker's voice. The Arabic-

English language pair is one perfect for investigating extra-linguistic context in interpretation. Arabic is viewed as a high-context language (Hall, 1976), which suggests that most of the meaning expressed is derived from surrounding context, relationships, and other contextual ideas rather than through direct verbal communication. English, on the other hand, qualifies as a low-context language because the majority of the meaning structure is provided by explicit language (Hall & Hall, 1990; Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). The study of extra-linguistic context is at the core of any serious investigation of Arabic–English and English–Arabic interpreting quality because of this inherent asymmetry, which places different demands on interpreters working in each direction.

Despite the fact that the role of contextual knowledge has been thoroughly addressed in literature regarding general theory of interpreting, there are only a few empirical studies addressing the interaction of extra-linguistic context with directionality, especially in the domain of Arabic-English and English-Arabic SI. The issue of directionality has remained one of the most controversial problems in the field of interpreting, with scholars arguing about whether interpreters are better at interpreting into their L1 or into their L2. Previous studies on this issue mainly focused on linguistic knowledge, cognitive load, and difficulties of lexical access and production of interpreters in different directions. At the same time, the question whether the role of extra-linguistic knowledge in interpreting performance is equal in both directions or depends on the target language has received comparatively little attention. This problem is particularly true for the Arabic-English language pair.

This specific combination of Arabic and English languages provides special linguistic and cultural difficulties, which go beyond lexical and grammatical aspects. In fact, such factors as rhetorical structure, discourse rules, religion, institutional terms, history, idioms, and cultural meaning may be quite difficult to understand without using background information. Thus, in order to achieve a proper interpretation of the message, one has to be bilingual as well as capable of realizing cultural connections and intentions. In other words, extra-linguistic context becomes an indispensable part of interpreting process rather than a complementary resource.

To address the purpose of the study, the research was guided by the following questions:

1. How important do professional interpreters perceive extra-linguistic context to be in Arabic–English and English–Arabic simultaneous interpreting?
2. Is there a statistically significant difference in interpreters' perceptions of the importance of extra-linguistic context between Arabic–English and English–Arabic simultaneous interpreting?
3. To what extent does extra-linguistic context contribute to interpreters' ability to deal with culturally specific references, metaphors, humour, and sarcasm in simultaneous interpreting?
4. How important is knowledge of the speaker's profile in Arabic–English and English–Arabic simultaneous interpreting?

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Extra-linguistic context in Interpreting Studies

Extra-linguistic context denotes all information sources that are outside the linguistic signal and yet influence meaning-making. Such sources comprise of background information, cultural information, institutional and political information, subject matter information, speaker-audience information, intentions of communication, situation information, and shared presuppositions. In conference interpreting, the interpreter is often forced to utilize such information in making meaning by resolving any ambiguity, predicting the discourse process, and choosing appropriate cultural information.

The notion of extra-linguistic context found itself within the field of interpreting studies via cognitive linguistics and pragmatic approach Interpretive theory of translation by Danica Seleskovitch and Marianne Lederer (2002) has been one of the early attempts to explain this

process comprehensively. In this theory, the interpreter is not supposed to translate words or grammatical structures but rather understand the message of the speaker. The meaning of the speaker's message results from the interface between linguistic information and the interpreter's cognitive context comprising of encyclopedic information, experience and knowledge about the communication situation. It is important for a successful interpretation because of deverbalization where the interpreter transcends the linguistic forms.

One of the first models of simultaneous interpreting to clearly formalize the interpreter's dependence on textual, situational, and encyclopaedic knowledge as parallel processing streams was Setton's (1999) relevance theoretic model. He suggests that interpreters create a "task-oriented mental model" by combining linguistic input cues with cultural and situational context judgments. The extralinguistic background serves as a compensatory resource that enables the interpreter to fill in inferential gaps when the linguistic signal is unclear, deteriorated, or culturally opaque (Setton, 1999).

A parallel viewpoint is offered by Gile's (2009) Effort Model, which views simultaneous interpretation as the management of a limited pool of cognitive resources allotted to listening, memory, and production. According to Gile's approach, the processing load on the listening effort is lessened by familiarity with the extra-linguistic context, which includes knowledge of the speaker, the event, and the cultural environment. This frees up cognitive capacity for the production effort. This has been empirically supported in the Arabic–English context: Es-sousy et al., (2024) argue that Arabic–English interpreters being far from the venue experience difficulties with the tonal and contextual features of humour, since in this case, such interpreters lack prosodic and situational cues, which makes them unable to provide appropriate interpretation of humour in the two languages. Their finding are consistent with Gile's prediction that reduced contextual information increases overall cognitive load.

Another notable contribution is provided by Ghelly Chernov's (2004) model of probability prediction, which illustrates the process of predicting the upcoming discourse on the part of the interpreter. According to Chernov (2004), successful simultaneous interpretation requires probabilistic predictions based on linguistic redundancy and knowledge of context. Skilled interpreters make use of their prior knowledge to predict lexical units, syntactic structures, and concepts before they are even completely pronounced by the speaker. Such anticipation reduces processing delay and contributes to smoother target-language production, particularly in highly specialized conference settings.

2.2 The significance of non-verbal communication in Arabic culture

High expressiveness, tight interpersonal distance, frequent gestures, prolonged eye contact, and a rich use of facial expression as a key carrier of social and emotional meaning are characteristics of nonverbal communication in Arabic culture (Al-Jaber, 2022). To communicate relational status, emotional states, and communication intentions, Arab communicators primarily rely on kinesic signals, such as body movement, gesture, and posture, in addition to oculusic cues, such as eye contact and gaze (Sadiki, 2020). These nonverbal channels are elevated to the rank of fundamental meaning making resources in Arabic communication in Hall's (1976) classification, frequently replacing or significantly altering the propositional content of accompanying speech.

These nonverbal clues are an essential addition to the language signal for the Arabic-English interpreter. The interpreter must rely on non-verbal cues like tone, gesture, and facial expression to ascertain the speaker's true communicative intent when an Arabic speaker employs euphemism or indirect language, which is a typical aspect of high-context communication where face-preserving indirection is often preferred over direct confrontation (El-Ajlouni, 2023). Through an analysis of Arabic deictic expressions, Al-Jaber (2022) shows how seemingly straightforward geographical and temporal reference items take on complicated culturally situated meanings that can only be correctly deciphered by simultaneously paying attention to verbal content and non-verbal context.

This observation is supported at the level of pragmatic inference. Es-sousy et al. (2024), note that context clues, including non-verbal cues, enable listeners to process and comprehend a speaker's communicative intention even when the linguistic content is ambiguous or indirect. This is especially important when interpreting from Arabic to English because the discourse in the source language is often organized on inferred rather than explicit meaning.

2.3 Cultural knowledge as extra-linguistic resource

The most available extra-linguistic context for the interpreter is cultural knowledge. It includes prior understanding of the values, belief systems, institutional structures, rhetorical conventions, allusive practices, and culturally specific referential systems that provide meaning to statements whose surface form may be pragmatically opaque but linguistically transparent. According to Baker (1992), cultural knowledge is one of the most difficult aspects of translation and interpretation since it cannot be learned by language study alone; rather, it necessitates long-term immersion in the source culture and ongoing updating in reaction to cultural changes.

Cultural knowledge functions on several levels in the Arabic-English environment. Arabic has a rich lexicon of religious and cultural expressions, such as Quranic allusions, prophetic sayings (ahadith), classical literary allusions, and proverbial formulae, that have deep connotative meaning for Arab audiences but may be completely unintelligible to English speaking communicators (El-Farahaty & Alwazna, 2024). Arab-Islamic communication patterns are characterized at the pragmatic level by what have been called high-context, implicit, and deductive communication: speakers typically organize discourse around general statements rather than explicit supporting details, assume shared background knowledge, and imply rather than state their intentions (Ajami, 2016). Instead of recognizing indirect or deferential language as a culturally normal communicative style, interpreters who are unaware of these patterns run the danger of misinterpreting it as ambiguity or avoidance.

It would be important to note that Arabic-speaking cultures should not be considered as a homogeneous entity. Even though they share history and language, different communication styles and pragmatic rules prevail in different countries and regions, such as Morocco, Egypt, and the Gulf States. It is confirmed by academic literature. Feghali (1997) argues about not considering the commonality of "Arab" communication patterns. Horesh (2016) also identifies a lot of sociolinguistic diversity in the Arab world. Similarly, Hachimi (2013) states that Moroccan Arabic is different from Egyptian or Gulf Arabic both linguistically and culturally. El-Dakhs (2018) identified dissimilar interactional strategies of Egyptian and Saudi participants in similar communicative situations. Cultural competence in one Arab country (such as Morocco) does not mean being competent in another (for example, Egypt and the Gulf). Interpreters need knowledge specific to the regional, national, and institutional context of the speaker—not just general "Arab cultural knowledge." Extra-linguistic competence, therefore, must include sensitivity to this within-culture variation, not just broad intercultural awareness.

2.4 Cultural variation in the speaker's paralinguistic tone

The Arabic and English speech communities have very different paralinguistic norms, which present unique difficulties for interpreters who operate in both languages. Wide pitch range, frequent volume change, strong emphasis, and a rhetorical history of oratorical flourish that gives vocal performance social and emotional meaning are all characteristics of Arabic discourse's great expressiveness (Ajami, 2016). The Arabic rhetorical tradition of eloquence (al balāgha) places special emphasis on the delivery style, including the voice, rhythm, and prosodic patterning of speech, as a symbol of social position and communicative proficiency.

Rather than creating a linguistically exact translation, interpreters working from Arabic into English who are aware of these paralinguistic standards are better able to convey the emotional impact and rhetorical aim of the original text.

2.5 Challenges in interpreting cultural references without extra linguistic context

One of the most frequently reported difficulties in Arabic–English and English–Arabic interpreting is cultural references (CRs). CRs are cultural elements that carry a "considerable degree of unclarity for the target audience due to [their] distance from the TL culture," according to El-Farahaty and Alwazna (2024). They point out that the distinction between culture-specific and non-culture-specific items is not always clear-cut and heavily depends on contextual factors. Cultural references become doubly opaque in the absence of extra-linguistic context because they lack the situational, gestural, and prosodic scaffolding that would typically enable a co-present interlocutor to deduce their intended meaning, in addition to requiring cultural knowledge that the interpreter may not possess.

2.6 Challenges in the Arabic–English direction

Cultural references that are particularly challenging to translate from Arabic into English include: Quranic and prophetic allusions, which have complex religious and ethical meanings for Arab audiences; classical Arabic literary and historical references; proverbial expressions that incorporate culturally specific worldviews; and the indirect, face-saving communication techniques typical of high-context Arab discourse (Abdul Baki, 2024 ; Ajami, 2016). The study by Es-sousy et al. (2024) details the particular situation of Arabic idioms, like the phrase "making the mud muddier," whose rhetorical and comedic impact depends only on cultural recognition. Without extra-linguistic contextual support, including knowledge of the political context in which such expressions are deployed and awareness of the speaker's ironic meaning, the interpreter provides literal rendering that empties the statement of its communicative intent.

The issue of unstated meaning is another type of difficulty brought about by Arabic discourse's high-context, implicit, and deductive structure. According to Abdul Baki (2024), Arab communicators often perceive social events through contextual inference, omitting crucial communicative content. The interpreter must use extra-linguistic resources, such as situational knowledge, prosodic cues, and cultural background knowledge, to ascertain what has been omitted and how it should be expressed when this implicit content needs to be made explicit in an English rendering, as required by the low-context norms of English communication (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988).

2.7 Challenges in the English–Arabic direction

Cultural allusions pose a distinct set of difficulties when translating from English to Arabic. Arab interpreters who are not well-versed in Anglophone culture may find it difficult to understand the numerous references to particular cultural contexts found in English language political and institutional discourse, such as national mythology, institutional history, legal and constitutional tradition, and popular cultural references. According to Ibrahim and Khalid (2025), interpreters who lack socio-political contextual knowledge are likely to produce renderings that are linguistically accurate but pragmatically impoverished. They document the challenge posed by terms whose ideological and emotive loads are so culturally specific as to resist equivalential rendering in Arabic.

Furthermore, when translating from English to Arabic, the interpreter must negotiate a diglossic target language, which is the difference between spoken Arabic vernaculars that may be more understandable to particular audiences and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), the normative medium of formal interpretation (Al-Harabsheh & Alhourani, 2024). The interpreter must make default decisions on register and variety in the absence of extra-linguistic cues about the audience's linguistic background and regional identity, which could lessen the rendition's communicative efficacy.

The existing literature clearly establishes that context facilitates comprehension, prediction, and cognitive processing during simultaneous interpreting. In similar vein, research concerning directionality indicates that the interpretation of performance is affected by more than one linguistic and cognitive factor. Nonetheless, only a few empirical studies have been conducted to explore the link between directionality and extra-linguistic context, especially for Arabic–English simultaneous interpretation. Secondly, perceptions of interpreters about the influence of contextual knowledge on their performance have not received adequate attention yet. The reason why it is essential to know the perceptions of interpreters is that they will give an insight into the strategies used by interpreters in real-life situations. This paper seeks to fill this gap by exploring how professional interpreters in Morocco perceive the role of extra-linguistic context in Arabic–English and English–Arabic simultaneous interpretation. This will be done using a quantitative approach. This research adds empirical insights into the link among contextual knowledge, directionality and interpreter competence. By focusing on a language pair that remains underrepresented in interpreting research, it also broadens the geographical and linguistic scope of current scholarship and offers implications for interpreter training, professional preparation, and future cognitive research.

3. Methodology

In this particular study, the method used to understand interpreters' perception about the importance of extra-linguistic context in Arabic-English and English-Arabic simultaneous interpreting was a quantitative survey research design. The reason for using quantitative research is because it is an effective way to look into the perceptions, attitudes, and professional behaviors among a relatively larger number of people (Creswell, 2009). The primary source of data was a structured questionnaire comprising closed-ended questions measured using Likert scales and multiple-choice items.

3.1 Participants

The study involved 107 professional bidirectional Arabic-English conference interpreters. Participants were recruited through professional interpreting associations, university networks, and online professional communities. The sample comprised conference interpreters, freelance interpreters, and graduates of translation and interpreting programmes who possessed practical experience in Arabic–English and English–Arabic simultaneous interpreting.

The participants represented a broad range of professional experience, enabling the study to capture perspectives from both novice and experienced practitioners. Although levels of expertise varied considerably, all participants had experience performing simultaneous interpreting between Arabic and English in professional or institutional settings.

3.2 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was administered electronically using an online survey platform. The survey link was distributed through professional interpreting networks, university departments, social media groups dedicated to translation and interpreting, and personal professional contacts.

Prior to taking the survey, the participants were informed about the objective of the study and also ensured that their answers will remain confidential and for educational purposes only.

3.3 Data Analysis

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the quantitative data. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviation were computed as descriptive statistics from the responses provided by the participants with respect to the relevance of extra-linguistic context in simultaneous interpreting.

To examine whether interpreters perceived differences in the importance of extra-linguistic context between Arabic–English and English–Arabic interpreting, paired-samples t-tests were conducted. The significance level was set at $p < .05$ for all inferential analyses.

4. Results

This section presents the quantitative findings concerning interpreters' perceptions of the role of extra-linguistic context in Arabic–English and English–Arabic simultaneous interpreting. The results are organized into four themes: (1) the perceived importance of extra-linguistic context across interpreting directions, (2) cultural references, (3) types of extra-linguistic cues, and (4) knowledge of the speaker's intentions. Descriptive statistics are presented first, followed by inferential analysis where appropriate.

4.1 Measuring interpreters views of the role of extra-linguistic context across different interpreting directions (Arabic-English and English-Arabic):

Descriptive statistics

To determine interpreters' perceptions of the importance of extra-linguistic context in SI, they were asked to evaluate on a scale from 1 to 5 the importance of extra linguistic context in Arabic-English interpreting and English-Arabic interpreting. The results (table 1) have shown that the interpreters perceived that extra-linguistic context, including the communicative situation, body language and the speaker's tone (Setton, 1999), as important for ensuring accurate interpretation in both directions. The mean score for the importance of extra-linguistic context in Arabic-English interpreting ($M = 1.67$, $SD = 0.71$) was lower than that of English-Arabic ($M = 1.85$, $SD = 0.78$). This lower mean for Arabic-English (1.67) compared to English-Arabic (1.85) indicates that interpreters viewed extra-linguistic context to be somewhat more important when interpreting from Arabic into English than in the opposite direction. The median and mode for both variables are similar 2, further confirming a consistent agreement among respondents.

Table 1: Comparing interpreters' perceptions of the importance of extra-linguistic context in Arabic-English and English-Arabic direction

Comparison	Direction	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Importance of extra-linguistic context in Arabic-English	1.67	107	.711	.069
Pair 1	Importance of extra-linguistic context in English-Arabic	1.85	107	.775	.075

Paired samples t-Test

The paired sample t test results revealed a significant difference in importance level between the two interpreting directions, $t(106) = -2.20$, $p = .046$. The calculated p-value (.046) falls within the accepted 0.05 threshold. The mean difference between the two is -0.178 , with 95% confidence interval = -0.352 (lower) to -0.003 (upper). These findings demonstrate that interpreters viewed extra-linguistic awareness is significantly more critical when interpreting from Arabic into English than from English into Arabic. This indicates that extra-linguistic information may play a more compensatory role when interpreting from Arabic into English possibly due to the specific Arabic discourse which involves culturally loaded references, implicit meanings and rhetorical styles. Thus, this requires interpreters to rely more heavily on contextual cues to ensure accurate comprehension and reformulation.

Table 2: Paired sample T-test

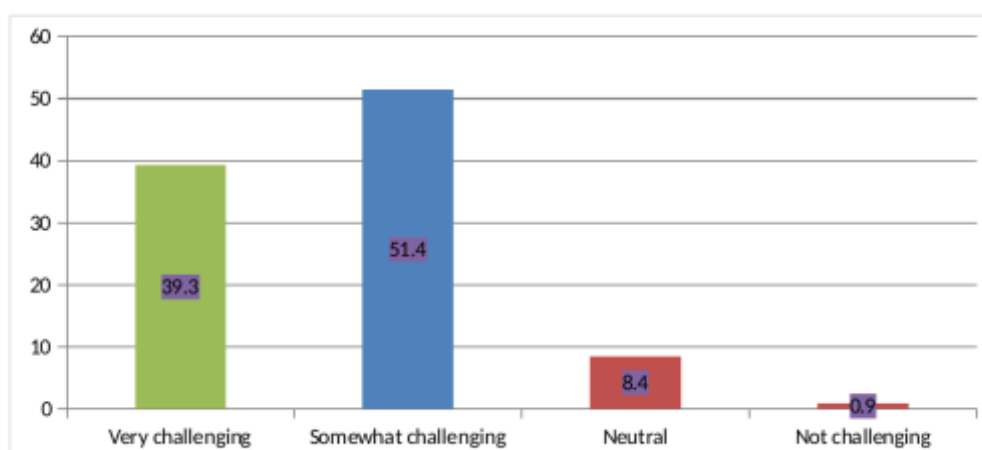
Comparison	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
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Extra-linguistic context in Arabic-English – English-Arabic	-.178	.909	.088	-.352	-.003	-2.020	106	.046
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4.2 Challenges while interpreting cultural content from Arabic into English without extra-linguistic context

The findings concerning interpreters' attitudes towards the challenges related to interpreting culturally specific content without extra-linguistic context provide empirical evidence for the important role of contextual knowledge in simultaneous interpreting. They clearly demonstrated, as shown in figure 19, that the majority of respondents (90.7%) agree that culturally specific items from Arabic into English is either very challenging 39.3% (N= 42) or somewhat challenging 51.4% (N= 55), respectively, while only 8.4% (N= 9) of them are neutral. Only a very small segment of respondents, accounting for 0.9 (N= 1) reported that this task is not challenging.

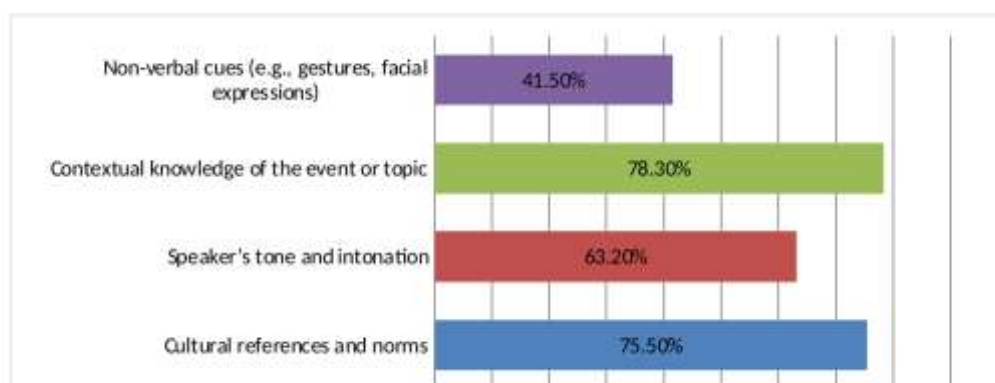
Figure 1: Graphic view: Challenges while interpreting from Arabic into English without extra-linguistic context



4.3 Extra-linguistic cues in Arabic-English interpreting direction

The interpreters were asked to indicate the extra-linguistic components that they believed most useful for accurate interpretation. They were allowed to select more than one answer. That's why, the percent of cases reaches 258.5%. The results (figure 2) provided insights into how interpreters perceive the contribution of extra-linguistic context. Contextual knowledge of the event or topic was found to be the most frequently reported cue, with 78.3% (N= 83) of interpreters highlighting its role in rendering accurate interpreting. In addition to topic familiarity, cultural references and norms were also seen as critical for developing a role of mediation for interpreters in a cross-cultural setting, accounting for 75.5% (N= 80). With regard, to speaker's tone and intonation, it was found that 63.2% (N= 67) of interpreters identified it as most useful while interpreting. It was ranked third but remained highly significant. However, interpreters found non-verbal cues, such as gestures and facial expressions, to be less critical, with only 41.5% (N= 44) reporting as the least frequently used extra-linguist cue among those examined. These results suggest that broader contextual and culturally embedded knowledge are prioritized over immediate physical cues. This indicates that for the Arabic-English pair, accuracy is achieved through shared cultural assumptions and pragmatic conventions.

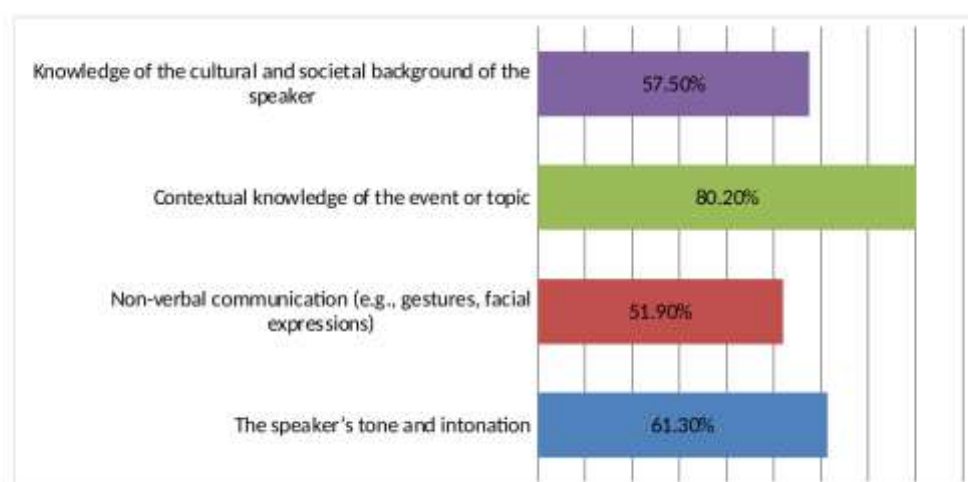
Figure 2: Graphic view: The most useful extra-linguistic cues in Arabic-English interpreting



4.4 Extra-linguistic cues in English-Arabic interpreting direction

The results graphically visualized in the graph below, have revealed some major differences in interpreters' attitudes patterns in both directions (Arabic-English and English-Arabic). The statistical distribution indicated that practitioners rely mostly on situational cognitive cues rather than linguistic data when interpreting from English into Arabic. 80.2% (N= 85) of the surveyed interpreters ranked —contextual knowledge of the event or topic as their most useful extra linguistic cues in English-Arabic interpreting direction. The overwhelming result testifies the necessity of top-down processing when encountering the structural and stylistic asymmetries between English and Arabic. Surprisingly, 61.3% (N= 65) of interpreters ranked —speaker's tone and intonation as second useful extra-linguistic cues while interpreting from English into Arabic. It can be noticed that this cue shifted ahead of cultural background compared to the reverse direction. With regard to —cultural and societal knowledge, it was selected as a critical cue by 57.5% (N= 61) of interpreters. Interestingly, the remaining cue of non-verbal communication scored 51.9% (N= 55) in English-Arabic direction. This cue seemed to be more prominent to interpreters than what it was found in Arabic-English direction.

Figure 3: Graphic view: The most useful extra-linguistic cues in English-Arabic interpreting found in Arabic-English direction.

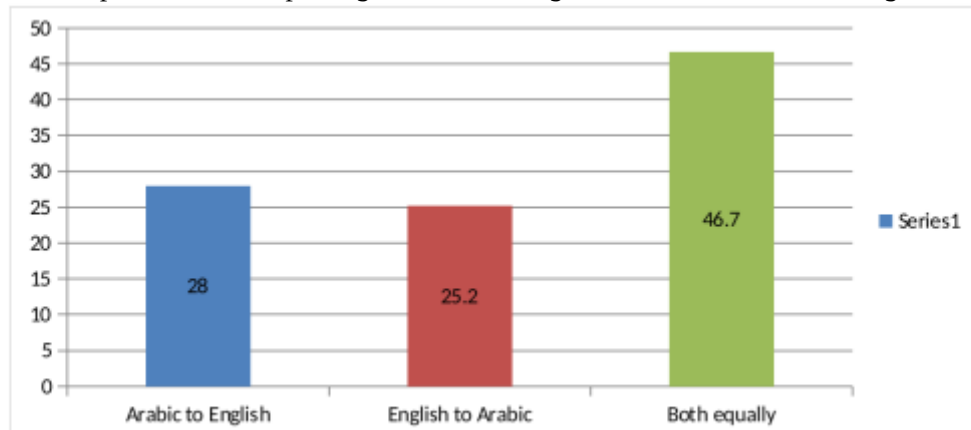


4.5 Interpreting direction with great reliance on extra-linguistic context

This issue under investigation reveals the professional reality that interpreting is a demanding cognitive task regardless of the direction, but specific challenges differ. Figure 4 below revealed that 46.7% of the interpreters believed that extra-linguistic context is equally important in both directions. 28% of them reported that Arabic-English direction requires

greater reliance on extra linguistic context. 25.2% of them chose English-Arabic direction which requires more reliance on extra-linguistic knowledge. They indicated that the majority of interpreters stress the importance of extra-linguistic context as an essential resource regardless of the interpreting direction, although a slightly larger segment of interpreters reported greater reliance on extra linguistic knowledge while interpreting from Arabic into English. This pattern aligns perfectly with earlier results (Paired sample T-test) indicating a statistically significant difference in the perceived importance of extra-linguistic context across the two language, and with the findings of cultural content challenges.

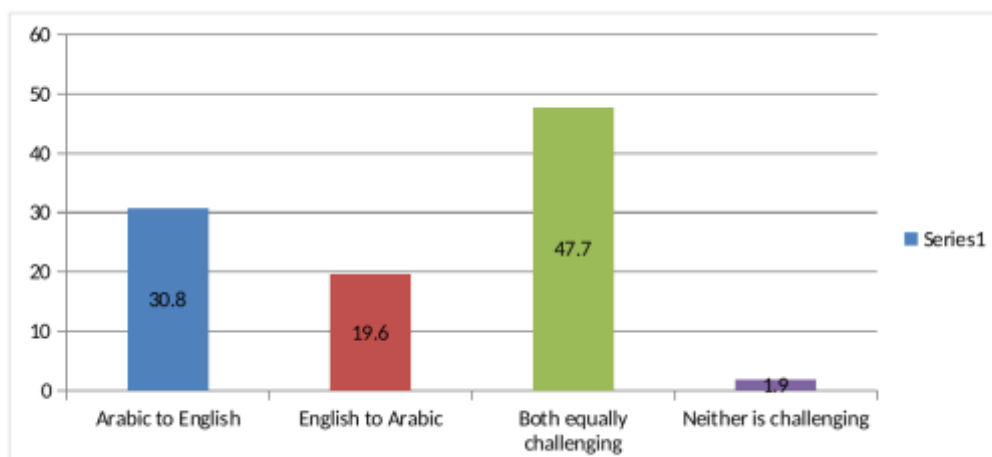
Figure 4: Graphic view: Interpreting direction with greater reliance on extra-linguistic context



4.6 Unfamiliar cultural references and metaphors interpreting without extra-linguistic context

The findings (in figure below) indicated the dominance of mutual difficulty regarding interpreting unfamiliar cultural references and figurative language without extra-linguistic knowledge, which are inherently demanding regardless of language direction. Nearly half of the interpreters (47.7%, N= 51) believed that both Arabic-English and English-Arabic interpreting direction are equally challenging in the absence of extra-linguistic information. This indicates although the interpreter shows mastery of linguistic knowledge, he/she may faces difficulty while interpreting an Arabic proverb or English idiom. Thus, the difficulty lies in the intent and cultural background of the speaker. However, an asymmetry has been revealed between the single directions. 30.8% (N= 33) of Interpreters perceived Arabic English interpreting as more challenging compared to English-Arabic interpreting, accounting for 19.6% (N= 21), while a hardly ever 1.9% (N= 2) reported that neither direction is challenging.

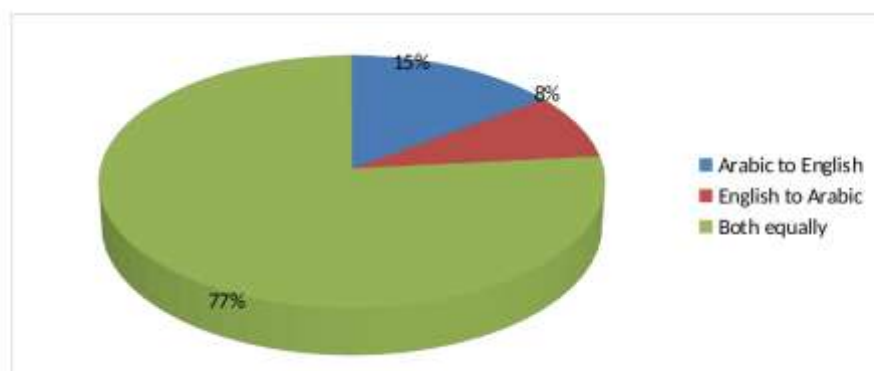
Figure 5: Graphic view: Unfamiliar cultural references and metaphors interpreting difficulty without extra-linguistic context



4.7 The importance of knowledge about the speaker in interpreting

While the previous questions focused on visible cues (body language and facial expressions) or linguistic challenges (metaphors), this question probes the pragmatic aspect of the speaker's speech. Regarding interpreters' views on the importance of knowledge about the speaker in interpreting, including his role, position, interaction and intention, figure 6 illustrates the predominance of perceiving this knowledge as crucial and helpful in both directions. The results demonstrated the highest level of consensus of any table analyzed so far. 82 (76.6%) respondents stated that knowledge of the speaker's roles and intentions helps interpreting equally in both directions. 16 (15.0%) respondents indicated they were of the view that this knowledge is more helpful when interpreting from Arabic into English and only 9 (8.4%) respondents believed that this knowledge is more helpful in English-Arabic direction. These findings suggest that knowing the speaker's role and interest is fundamental in rendering successful interpreting regardless of directionality, although a small percentage of interpreters indicate greater reliance on this knowledge when interpreting from Arabic into English compared to English-Arabic. The dominance of the response —equally important— suggests that interpreters see knowledge of the speaker's role as fundamental component of interpreting competence rather than a direction-specific skill. This knowledge may help the interpreter infer intended meaning, anticipate message structure, and — “can help to minimise potential sources of misunderstanding” (Hale, 2007, p.17, cited in De Boe, et al. 2021, p.9). The split among those who chose specific direction still go in line with the established pattern in the research. The preponderance of the Arabic-English direction suggests that the implicit meaning and intent in Arabic speech is harder to decipher without extra-linguistic help. The lowest percentage of English-Arabic direction may imply that the meaning and intent in English are often perceived as more straightforward or explicit, thus; requiring less reliance on external context for these professionals.

Figure 6: Graphic view: Knowledge of the speaker's profile helps more in interpreting



5. Discussion

The research results presented in this study confirm the central importance of extra linguistic context — which involves aspects related to communicative situation, speaker intentions, body language, cultural knowledge, and audience reaction — as a source of information for SI in both directions. Participants in the study confirmed their reliance on contextual cues to facilitate comprehension, decision-making, and reformulation tasks, thereby supporting the general theoretical perspective that interpreters' success in their work depends on their ability to use both linguistic, pragmatic and contextual information (Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Nord, 1997).

It should be noted that one statistically significant differential feature was found in the assessment of extra-linguistic context – its perceived significance proved to be somewhat greater in A>E interpreting than in E>A interpreting. While the effect size was modest, the finding is theoretically meaningful and extends earlier research on the interaction between directionality and contextual processing (Gile, 2009; Chang & Schallert, 2007). The possible explanation for this asymmetry lies in the discourse characteristics of Arabic communication. Arabic discourse is frequently marked by high degrees of implicitness, reliance on shared cultural and religious knowledge, elaborate rhetorical conventions, and dense use of allusion, proverb, and culturally embedded metaphor (El-Zawawy, 2016). Interpreting such discourse into English requires the interpreter to make extensive use of extra-linguistic context simply to identify the intended meaning before the task of reformulation in English can begin. This interpretation is strongly corroborated by the findings on culturally specific content.

This finding supports Daniel Gile's Effort Models, which conceptualize simultaneous interpreting as the coordination of several concurrent cognitive efforts, including listening and analysis, production, memory, and coordination (Gile, 2009). According to Gile, interpreters operate under conditions of limited processing capacity; whenever one cognitive effort demands additional resources, the performance of other efforts may be compromised. Extra-linguistic context can therefore be viewed as a cognitive resource that reduces processing demands by facilitating comprehension and minimizing uncertainty.

An overwhelming proportion of respondents reported that interpreting culturally specific expressions from Arabic into English without contextual support was either very challenging or somewhat challenging. Similarly, nearly half identified Arabic–English as the more difficult direction for interpreting culturally embedded references and metaphors. This result is in close agreement with relevance-theoretic theories of meaning construction (Sperber & Wilson, 1995), which claims that the listener-interpreter creates meaning using both linguistic input and context-based assumptions. Naturally, when the context assumed in the message requires cultural-specific knowledge not available to the interpreter, the degree of required mental effort increases significantly, thus increasing the likelihood of error and eventually lead to misinterpretation.

The second finding that should be considered is the relative importance of particular extra linguistic cues for interpreters. Both in A>E and in E>A interpreting, the most helpful extra linguistic cues came from such areas as speaker's tone and intonation, communicative situation, non-verbal communication, and audience reaction. It may be assumed that this consistency proves that interpreters rely on the same set of multimodal cues irrespective of whether they are interpreting into or out of their native languages, a conclusion supported by other studies that emphasize the multimodal nature of conference interpreting and the role of non-verbal means in comprehension and anticipation (Pöchhacker, 2004).

The results also converge with the cognitive-pragmatic theory proposed by Setton, who sees interpreting as an activity of making inferences in communication rather than merely a linguistic phenomenon. Indeed, in Setton's view, interpreters develop dynamic representations by combining information about language with additional context and pragmatic assumptions on behalf of communicating individuals.

A very remarkable result is connected with participants' assessment of speaker's intentions. More than 75 percent of subjects have stated that it is equally important for successful interpreting of the message whether they understand the speaker's intentions in Arabic-English and English-Arabic interpretations. This strong consensus suggests that interpreters perceive communicative intention as a central determinant of successful interpreting regardless of language direction.

6. Conclusion

This research explored the impact of extra-linguistic context on Arabic-English and English-Arabic simultaneous interpreting based on the views of 107 professional interpreters in the Arab countries. It has clearly demonstrated that the use of extra-linguistic context is considered a crucial factor in successful simultaneous interpreting, whether it is carried out in Arabic-English or English-Arabic modes. Participants pointed out that knowing extra-linguistic context improves comprehension, helps to construct meanings correctly, helps to retrieve terminological equivalents and also helps to handle culturally loaded references and communicative nuances better.

Quantitative results revealed that participants placed high importance to the use of extra-linguistic context in both Arabic-English and English-Arabic simultaneous interpreting. A statistically significant difference was found in the importance placed to extra-linguistic context in Arabic-English and English-Arabic simultaneous interpreting; however, the difference was relatively small, with participants perceiving contextual knowledge as slightly more important when interpreting from Arabic into English. It implies that even though the directionality of interpretation influences the use of extra-linguistic context, this kind of context remains an important tool of successful interpreting regardless of the target language.

The paper also offers insights into the debate regarding the role of directionality in interpreting research. Whereas most literature has tended to view linguistic proficiency and cognitive load as reasons for the disparities in interpreting direction, the results of the study indicate that contextual knowledge is another critical factor which needs to be taken into consideration when it comes to the interpreting process. Through the discussion of the interrelationship between directionality and the extra-linguistic context in the Arabic-English language pair, the study brings new light to the multi-faceted nature of interpreting competence through providing empirical evidence of a language combination which has been less explored by scholars.

In conclusion, this paper has shown how context plays an essential role in simultaneous interpreting. In both Arabic-English and English-Arabic simultaneous interpreting, it can be said that the knowledge of context allows for accurate understanding of the intended meaning by allowing interpreters to understand what lies beneath the words spoken. With increased demand of interpreting skills in a multicultural and multilingual world, the fusion of linguistic

proficiency and contextual knowledge shall continue to play an essential part in defining interpretation expertise.

7. Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First, the study draws heavily on self-reported survey data, so it captures what interpreters believe about the role of context in their work, not actual proof of how it affects their performance or thinking in real time.

A second limitation concerns the sample of 107 professional interpreters. Although the sample provides a substantial body of evidence for an exploratory study of Arabic–English and English–Arabic interpreting, the study did not distinguish systematically between interpreters according to their specific regional varieties of Arabic or their degree of exposure to different Arabic-speaking communities. This latter issue is particularly relevant because Arabic-speaking communities are not culturally or communicatively homogeneous. Moroccan, Egyptian, Levantine, Iraqi, and Gulf contexts, for example, may differ in pragmatic conventions, cultural references, institutional practices, and communicative expectations. Consequently, familiarity with one Arabic-speaking context cannot necessarily be assumed to provide equivalent contextual access to another.

Lastly, "extra-linguistic context" is a pretty broad idea, it covers cultural knowledge, pragmatics, situational awareness, subject expertise, and more, and the study treated it as one general concept rather than breaking it down into these separate pieces. In other words, what is being discussed here is simply how much interpreters believe in the importance of context, and not the evidence of its direct positive effect on interpretation.

8. Practical Implications

Since interpreters clearly see extra-linguistic context as a key resource in both directions of Arabic-English interpreting, the study argues this should not be treated as an additional skill in training programs. It needs to be built into the core curriculum. Trainees should work on building both broad general knowledge and deep expertise in specific fields, using real material like conference speeches, news, institutional documents, and terminology from areas like politics, economics, medicine, and law.

Training should also focus specifically on cultural references, humor, sarcasm, metaphors, and figuring out what a speaker really means, since these all require relying on contextual and pragmatic understanding rather than just language skills. Practical exercises could include having trainees research the speaker, topic, institution, and audience beforehand, and think through potential cultural or conceptual difficulties in advance. This kind of preparation builds the anticipation skills that Chernov's (2004) model highlights, and it takes some of the cognitive load off interpreters when they are actually working in real time.

For working professionals, the message is similar: preparation should be seen as a core part of the job, not an optional extra. Digging into background materials, the speaker's past speeches, current events, specialized terminology, and cultural nuances all give interpreters a stronger foundation to work from. And since the study found context mattered slightly more going into Arabic than out of it (though it was important both ways), this preparation work is worth doing regardless of which direction someone is interpreting.

9. Future Research

Future research should go beyond self-reported perceptions and actually measure how context affects real interpreting performance. This could mean experimental studies where some interpreters get detailed background preparations and others receive limited background information, then comparing things like accuracy, omissions, fluency, and ear-voice span. Corpus-based studies analyzing real Arabic-English interpreting recordings could also reveal how context shows up in anticipation, reformulation, explicitation, and terminology choices,

with special attention to different types of anticipation (lexical, collocational, discourse, pragmatic, cultural).

Among other proposals are the use of eye-tracking and reaction time measures for cognitive load and decision making and the comparison of interpreters of various experience levels to examine whether effective context use is a skill that develops with time.

Future research could also use separate investigations of various types of contextual knowledge including, cultural, pragmatic, institutional, and subject-matter in order to find out which ones really matter in interpreting quality.

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