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**Job stress factors in interpreters' perspectives:
an investigation at Nguyen Phat Service Trading
Development Company Limited**

Instructor name:

Ha Thao Ly M.A

Student name:

Nguyen Ngoc Bich Tran

Student ID: 97011901702



Lewis Campus

Email: admission@siu.edu.vn

Website: www.siu.edu.vn

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DECLARATION

I, Nguyen Ngoc Bich Tran, am delighted to present my graduation thesis, which represents the culmination of my academic journey and research conducted during my studies. In this study, I have completed under the guidance of Ms. Ha Thao Ly, my instructor at The Saigon International University. This thesis has not been submitted previously for any academic or professional purpose. I understand that any form of plagiarism or misrepresentation in this thesis is unacceptable and can result in serious consequences. I am fully aware that if any form of academic dishonesty is detected in this thesis, my university, Saigon International University, may take disciplinary action by its academic policies and guidelines.

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines job stress factors from the perspectives of interpreters in the context of simultaneous interpreting at Nguyen Phat Service Trading Development Company Limited. The study aimed to understand the specific stress factors experienced by interpreters and addressed the challenges they encounter in their professional roles. The primary objective was to identify the key factors that contribute to job stressors as perceived by interpreters.

A mixed-methods approach was employed to gather data for this study. Quantitative data was collected through a survey questionnaire administered to a sample of interpreters at Nguyen Phat Company. The survey assessed various job stress factors, including physical working conditions, increased time on task, speech delivery, and limited speaker visibility. Additionally, the qualitative approach was applied not only to enhance the understanding of the issue but also to gather valuable information from simultaneous interpreters' viewpoints about job stress factors. The analysis of the survey data revealed several significant job stress factors experienced by interpreters. The qualitative interviews provided recommendations to improve the work characteristics and environment for interpreters.

The findings from the data analysis regarding job stress factors in interpreters' perspectives provided valuable information for the discussions to answer the research question. In summary, this study examined the perspectives of simultaneous interpreters regarding four key job stress factors. The findings suggested that organizations should prioritize creating a supportive work environment and offering resources to help interpreters manage the stressors they face. The discussion section highlighted the implications of these results and underscored the importance of ongoing research and interventions to enhance job satisfaction, also the performance of interpreters.

ABBREVIATION LIST

Abbreviation	Meaning
AIIC	The International Association of Conference Interpreters
SI	Simultaneous Interpreting
CI	Consecutive Interpreting
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
SPIN	Speech Perception in Noise
STAI	The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory
ELF	English as a Lingua Franca
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
fMRI	Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging
WCST	Wisconsin Card Sorting Task
ILO	International Labor Organization

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1. The rationale of the study

The concept of stress has been discussed in translation and interpreting studies, highlighting its potential impact on job performance (AIIC, 2002; Korpala, 2017). Previous research has predominantly focused on physical and psychological stress experienced by conference interpreters and sign language interpreters (Tommola & Hyönä, 1990; Kurz, 2003; Klonowicz, 1994; Moser-Mercer, Künzli, & Korac, 1998; Bontempo, 2012; Harvey, 2003; Riccardi, Marinuzzi, & Zecchin, 1998).

Despite the significance of these studies, there was a noticeable gap in the literature regarding research on job stressors, specifically in the context of simultaneous interpreting in Vietnam, particularly within the commercial sector. Therefore, there was a pressing need for further investigation to deepen our understanding of the unique challenges faced by interpreters in this specific setting. The rationale for conducting this study was to examine the stress factors encountered by interpreters at Nguyen Phat Service Trading Development Company Limited, thereby contributing to knowledge and proposing potential measures to address these challenges and assist interpreters in effectively coping with job-related stressors. By clarifying job stressors in the simultaneous interpreting field, particularly in Vietnam commercials, the study aimed to provide valuable insights and solutions for novice and expert interpreters in the simultaneous interpreting process.

1.2. The objectives of the research

The study aimed to understand the specific stress factors experienced by interpreters and addressed the challenges they encounter in their professional roles. The primary objective was to identify the key factors that contribute to job stress as perceived by interpreters at Nguyen Phat Service Trading Development Company Limited. Through this investigation, the objectives encompassed examining the various stressors encountered by interpreters, understanding their perspectives and interpretations of job stress, investigating the impact of stress on their

performance, and proposing measures or recommendations to mitigate the identified stress factors. The research also attempted to contribute to interpreters' understanding of stress in simultaneous interpreting and enhanced their job satisfaction and overall performance.

1.3. Research questions

This research tried to find answers to the following question:

- What perceptions do interpreters at Nguyen Phat Service Trading Development Company Limited have about job stress factors?

1.4. The significance of the study

This article presented a preliminary investigation into the job stressors from the interpreters' viewpoints at Nguyen Phat Service Trading Development Company Limited. The study had the contributions in many ways. Firstly, this study contributed to the field of simultaneous interpreting studies by offering insights into the specific challenges and stressors experienced by interpreters. By focusing on their perspectives, this investigation provided a deeper understanding of the unique demands of the interpreting profession. Next, the study contributed to organizational improvement within Nguyen Phat Service Trading Development Company Limited. By investigating the stress factors interpreters encounter, the company could implement targeted strategies to enhance their performance and create a more supportive work environment. Thirdly, some practices and guidelines for managing job stress in the interpreting profession could be yielded from the research findings. By investigating interpreters' perspectives about the stress factors in simultaneous interpreting, thus, the broader interpreting community could strive towards better working conditions and improved interpreter' performance.

1.5. Scope of the study

The study would be conducted at Nguyen Phat Service Trading Development Company Limited, as well as the survey and interview. This research primarily concentrated on interpreters'

perspectives on job stress factors in simultaneous interpreting. Interpreters encountered various job stressors, such as challenging physical working conditions, extended time on task, speech delivery, and insufficient visibility of speakers. Thirty-five simultaneous interpreters would be invited to do a survey and answered interview questions through email, including novices and experts at Nguyen Phat Service Trading Development Company Limited to complete this study. The results collected from the online survey and interview analyzed how interpreters perceive job stressors in simultaneous interpreting would be applied.

1.6. The organization of the study

This study would be structured into five comprehensive chapters, each serving a distinct purpose in contributing to an overall understanding of job stressors from interpreters' perspective in the context of Nguyen Phat Service Trading Development Company Limited:

Chapter One initiates the study by giving an extensive introduction that included the rationale, the objectives set, the research questions that need to address, the significance, and the scope of the study. This introductory chapter served as a solid foundation for the subsequent chapters, providing context and setting the stage for the investigation.

Chapter Two reviews the literature on interpreting, especially simultaneous interpreting, examining the role of interpreters and highlighting factors that contribute to job stress in the interpreting process.

Chapter Three takes a closer look at the research methodology employed to achieve the study's objectives. This chapter described the study design in detail, elucidates the chosen data collection methods, and outlines the data analysis procedures adopted. It highlighted the careful approach taken to collect accurate and reliable data and ensured that these research objectives would be effectively addressed.

Chapter Four presents a detailed analysis of the collected data. This chapter analyzed data presenting the study including the findings and discussion.

Chapter Five concludes the study by providing a brief but comprehensive summary of the findings obtained from the data analysis. This chapter also investigated the implications for both

practical and further academic exploration. Moreover, it offered suggestions for future research endeavors, paving the way for continued investigation and advancement of knowledge in this field.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definition of key terms

2.1.1. Definition of interpretation

Interpretation, traditionally considered a subset of translation, was concerned with converting language into spoken or written form. According to Angelelli (2000), the main objective of interpretation was to effectively convey the intended impact of a message from the source language to the target audience. Recognized by practitioners and scholars in interpreting studies, interpreting was widely acknowledged as a demanding and stress-inducing task. Conference interpreting, in particular, posed significant mental challenges and fell under the category of "extreme language use" (Obler, 2012), along with the inherent psychological challenges that characterize the practice of interpreting.

As the field of interpreting has evolved, alternative approaches have emerged. Gish (1986, 1992) presented a goal-to-detail/detail-to-goal schema for information processing in interpreting, while Isham (1986) focused on text analysis, considering the purpose, content, context, register, and effect of a message. Moreover, Isham and Gish's approaches provided valuable tools for text analysis and served as the foundation for the analysis phases in the model described below. Works by Wadensjö (1998) and Roy (2000) have also influenced the understanding of interpreters' context and the background knowledge required to make informed decisions regarding language and interaction patterns during an interpreted event.

The understanding of context and the background information required by interpreters to make numerous decisions during an interpreted event has been influenced by the works of Wadensjö (1998) and Roy (2000). These works have shed light on the importance of observing both the language being used and the patterns of interaction in an interpretive context. Interpretation was the process of conveying the meaning of spoken or signed language from one language to another, either in real-time (simultaneously) or with a delay (consecutively).

Pöchhacker (2004) offered a comprehensive overview of the various theoretical and methodological paradigms that have influenced interpretation research and interpreting models. It is noted that no single model could fully capture the entirety of the interpretation, as each

model reflected the researcher's or scholar's epistemological stance. Smith et al. (2002) highlighted additional factors that need to be considered within cognitive models of interpreting. They argued that even highly competent interpreters that fluent bilinguals must constantly evaluate their options to convey the meaning and intent of the speaker accurately.

2.1.2. Definition of simultaneous interpreting

According to Bühler (1986), simultaneous interpreting was an intricate activity that required the interpreter to engage in multiple activities simultaneously. These activities included attentive listening, analyzing incoming information, comprehending meaning, translating, editing the interpretation, and reproducing the speaker's message in real time. Interpreters often work with at least two languages and proficient interpreters might handle three or more languages, all of which require a high level of proficiency. The primary objective of interpreters was to accurately convey the original sender's message without any loss of information in real-time.

Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997) suggested that interpretation could be categorized based on constructs such as modes and types. Modes of interpreting refer to how it was performed, while the types refer to the context in which interpretation took place. It was essential to identify and acquire the skills and strategies required for different modes of interpreting through training and practice to overcome the issue that might arise. The two most common types of interpreting were consecutive interpreting (CI) and simultaneous interpreting (SI).

Russell (2005) defined interpreting as a complex process involving simultaneous perception, comprehension, translation, and language production under severe pressure and time constraints. SI was used commonly in conveying information in internationally broadcast summits, meetings, conferences, political statements, press conferences, and parliamentary debates. Russell (2005) explained SI is the process of interpreting the target language while the source language message is being delivered.

Alexieva (1991) found that certain types of texts could not be interpreted successfully under the challenging conditions of simultaneous interpreting, such as simultaneous performance of speakers and interpreters, rapid transmission of the source language, limited contextual knowledge, and a single presentation of the source utterance. Barnwell (1989) agreed with this

view, stating that simultaneous interpreting provides little opportunity to consider carefully the language choices required for an accurate translation.

Shlesinger (2000) put forward the idea that simultaneous interpreting was an incredibly complex task, and it was possible that we might never fully comprehend all the factors involved in the process and how they interacted with each other. However, she proposed that interpreting might involve a combination of cognitive processing and process strategies. The level of cognitive effort required in simultaneous interpreting could vary depending on factors such as the communication context, the complexity of the source text in terms of concepts and language, and the individual attributes of the interpreter (Tommola & Hyönä, 1996).

2.1.3. Definition of interpreters

According to Nolan (2005), the translator's work resembled that of a writer, while the interpreter's role was more akin to that of an actor. This distinction emphasized the unique skill sets and competencies required in each profession. Translation involved the transfer of written texts from one language to another, whereas interpretation focused on translating spoken language in real-time. Despite these differences, there has been an increase in interest in both fields with more individuals aspiring to pursue careers in translation and interpreting, as observed by McCartney (2016). Interpreters, in particular, were highly trained professionals who specialized in facilitating communication between individuals who spoke different languages, as highlighted by Lopez (2002).

Interpreters must possess a high level of proficiency in a foreign language to effectively convey messages between parties speaking different languages, as they play a crucial role in bridging linguistic and cultural gaps that could arise in various settings, such as between clients and counselors or within larger entities like families and school systems, as noted by Goh, Dunnigan, and Schuchman (2004) and Hillier, Loshak, Rahman, and Marks (1994). Simultaneous interpretation required interpreters should not only have a deep understanding of the languages involved but also be aware of the cultural nuances and customs of the individuals they are translating. By acting as facilitators, interpreters could help promote effective communication, understanding, and empathy among individuals from different linguistic and cultural

backgrounds. The presence of a language interpreter in counseling settings has been found to increase client comfort and willingness to return for services (Hillier et al., 1994).

Interpreters faced various job stressors, including time pressure, challenging physical conditions, high-stakes assignments, and heavy workloads (Blumenthal et al., 2006). Additionally, interpreters must navigate challenges like reading speeches aloud, deciphering foreign accents, comprehending complex numbers, and managing other elements that demand additional cognitive processing capacity. These factors, collectively known as "problem triggers" (Gile, 2009), require interpreters to possess high levels of cognition and concentration.

Zapolskykh (2017) highlighted that interpreters often found themselves in situations where they could not ask for information repetition or clarification, underscoring the critical importance of their ability to convey information in real-time accurately.

However, it was necessary to note that an interpreter's performance was not solely dependent on linguistic knowledge, as Setton (1994) pointed out. Therefore, interpreters should not only have to be good at language skills but also could navigate complex linguistic and cultural nuances in various settings to facilitate effective communication between individuals or groups from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Gile, 2009).

2.1.4. Definition of stress

In the biological approach by Selye (1976), stress was defined as a reaction based on the fight-or-flight response to a stressor which was an event or external stimuli that motivated the organism to react. Selye (1974) also distinguished between two types of stress: eustress and distress. "Eustress" stimulated and motivated the performance in stressful situations, when "distress" was unpleasant, decreased performance, and could lead to mental and physical problems (Rice, 2011:26). For example, someone who became paralyzed with fear on stage and was unable to continue performing experiences significance distress that perceived as disagreeable. The biological approach focused on the physiological response to a stressor and recognized that the reaction could be beneficial or harmful.

In contrast, the transactional model defined stress as a specific relationship between the person and the environment, appraised by the individual as taxing or exceeding their resources and threatening their well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In this model, the cognitive appraisal of an external stressor determined how an individual perceived a potentially stressful experience and whether it was seen as a threat or a challenge to the organism. While physiological reactions were integral to stress (Selye, 1974, 1976), the transactional model emphasized the cognitive appraisal of the stressor and its impact on an individual's perception of threat or challenge. Lazarus and Folkman's model considered the transaction between the potentially threatening environment and the coping resources of the organization. For example, public speaking, including consecutive interpreting, might be perceived as dangerous by one person but as a stimulating challenge by another. This view was supported by more recent accounts that view the stress process in terms of external challenges, perceptions of challenges, coping resources, and perceptions of coping resources (Monroe, 2008).

When translators and interpreters faced stress, it meant that they were in a state where the demands placed on them exceed their internal or external coping resources (Bontempo and Malcolm, 2012). Psychology has explored various approaches to understanding stress. Stress has been seen as a reaction (Selye, 1976) or as a transaction between the individual and the external world, taking into account their coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

While there has been substantial discussion about the pressures and strains faced by interpreters in international forums, there has been limited empirical research to identify the sources of stress affecting them (Cooper et al., 1982). Some studies have explored stressors in conference interpreting, physiological stress responses, and energy management during information processing in interpreters, the effect of prolonged turns on interpreters' stress and interpretation quality, and the implications of remote interpreting on stress in large multilingual conferences. However, despite increasing interest in the pressures experienced by professional linguists, stress studies have primarily focused on skill deficiencies or performance expectations, with little research on the psychological impact of ethical dilemmas on translators and interpreters, and no studies specifically investigating the influence of ethical stress factors on their performance (Schwenke, et al., 2014).

2.2. Interpreting and stress

Simultaneous interpreting was a complex cognitive task that imposed specific demands on memory resources. Specifically, the rapid language switching and multitasking involved in simultaneous interpreting, such as information reception, representation, storage, extraction, and code-switching, pose significant challenges to interpreters' memory resources. Consequently, the connection between memory and interpreting, particularly the interaction between working memory and simultaneous interpreting, has become a central concern in contemporary cognitive psychology and interpreting research (Danks, Shreve, Fountain, and McBeath, 1997; Cowan, 2000). Interpreting was recognized as one of the most demanding activities, and several studies have confirmed its stressful nature. Many factors identified by Kurz (2003) that contributed to job stress among interpreters included the need to maintain a high level of focus throughout assignments, significant cognitive load, time constraints, the confined space of the booth, and fatigue. These factors were considered objective stressors that elicit stressors.

Stress was seen as something harmful to one's health. However, it was Hans Selye who introduced the term "stress" in 1926 within the context of stress theory. Selye defined stress as the body's non-specific response to any need, whereas non-specific refers to the common changes caused by different stressors. Selye further differentiated between two types of stress effects: eustress and distress. Eustress was associated with desirable outcomes, while distress was associated with undesirable consequences (Selye, 1980). He discussed eustress as a factor that refers to positive aspects of stress, such as stressful situations that could be perceived as challenging and motivating. Overcoming such challenges could enhance self-esteem and foster positive responses potentially to future stressors (Suedfeld, 1997).

Gile (2009) introduced the term "problem triggers" to describe factors that required deep processing capacity and were challenging for interpreters. The presence of these factors could reduce the quality and accuracy of interpretation and cause additional stress. Examples of such factors included proper names, enumerations, morphological and syntactic features of the source language, challenging foreign accents, delivery speed, and numerical data.

As stated by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), one of the fundamental models was the transactional model of stress. According to them, psychological stress was a relationship between the person

and the environment, appraised by the individual as taxing or exceeding their resources and endangering their well-being. Thus, stress was seen as a dynamic process and a transaction between individuals and their environment. Individuals appraise stressful situations as challenging or threatening (Lazarus, 1966).

2.3. Interpreters' occupational stress factors

Stress was a psychophysiological response triggered by a perceived threat or danger. There were three main categories of stressors: environmental stressors (such as noise or heat), mental stressors (involving tasks requiring prolonged attention or decision-making), and interpersonal stressors (arising from interactions with colleagues, superiors, or subordinates) (Kurz, 1983b).

Interpersonal stressors, in particular, could become significant sources of stress if individuals have limited control over their workload or could not anticipate critical situations. One conceptual framework used for analyzing stress is Facet Analysis (Shirom, 1982).

While minor stress generally was believed to enhance memory performance by increasing arousal levels, occupational stress has been associated with psychological distress and negative health outcomes. Stress could have disruptive after-effects, including persistent physiological and psychological distress, reduced task performance, and long-term impacts on cognitive capabilities (Tayler, 1995, and Riccardi, 1998). The literature has identified various work-related stress factors specific to simultaneous interpreting.

Research commissioned by the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) was among the first large-scale studies on the stress experienced by conference interpreters. According to the research, 66 percent of respondents reported a high or very high level of occupational stress (AIIC, 2002).

2.3.1. Physical working conditions

According to a study conducted with thirty-three interpreters in Europe (Cooper et al., 1982), the physical conditions of the interpreters' work environment could contribute to their levels of

physical comfort and, consequently, stress. The following environmental factors were identified as general sources of stress:

- Poor ventilation: Inadequate airflow or ventilation in the booth could lead to discomfort and difficulty in maintaining a fresh and oxygenated environment.
- Excessive or inadequate lighting: Inappropriate lighting conditions, whether too bright or insufficient, could strain the eyes and cause visual fatigue.
- Small booths: Cramped or small working spaces could contribute to a sense of confinement and discomfort, limiting the interpreters' mobility and freedom of movement.
- Acoustics: Issues related to sound quality and acoustics, such as improper microphone use or background noise, could create challenges for interpreters in accurately hearing and understanding the speaker's words.
- Uncomfortable seating: Inadequate or uncomfortable seating arrangements could result in physical strain, particularly on the neck and back, leading to discomfort and potential long-term health issues.

Early studies on stress in interpreting also investigated the impact of the work environment, specifically examining factors such as temperature, humidity, and air quality within the interpreting booth (Kurz, 1981, 1983a, 1983b; Kurz and Kolmer, 1984). These studies recognized that the physical conditions of the work environment might directly influence the interpreters' well-being and stress levels.

2.3.1.1. Room temperature

According to studies conducted by Kurz (1981, 1983a) on the physical measurements of interpreting booths during conference days, the following findings were observed regarding temperature, humidity, and air circulation:

- Temperature increases during working days: There was a significant average temperature increase inside the booths throughout the working day. This suggested that the temperature within the booths tended to rise as the day progresses.
- Differences between mobile and permanent booths: The temperature increase was generally higher in mobile booths compared to permanent booths. Mobile booths were