



Users' Quality Expectations in Conference Interpreting

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Abstract

This paper is part of an unpublished doctoral thesis on “Conference Interpreting in Malaysia”. Expectations of users were explored by an on-site questionnaire-based survey study in Malaysian conference interpreting setting. The relative importance of various linguistic and non-linguistic criteria for quality was obtained through quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. A reliable sample of 256 interpreting “users” (Cronbach alpha coefficient=0.81) were collected from five international conferences in Malaysia. Analysis of the results revealed that users attached high value to the linguistic criteria of sense-consistency with original message (94.1%), logical cohesion (91.1%), fluency of delivery (91%), correct terminology (89.8%), correct grammar (82.8%), completeness of interpretation (80.2%), synchronicity (73%), and style (70.5%) rating the criteria very important or important. The parameters of pleasant voice (60.9%), lively intonation (60.4%), and native accent (57.3%) were considered desirable, but not essential as they received the least importance by the users. Findings from the open-ended questions showed that users consider “wide range of topics” and “broadening one’s horizons” as the most interesting aspects of conference interpreting. Users indicated that they were willing to listen to the interpretation even if they understood it. These suggest that interpreters are seen as a professional source of knowledge from users’ perspectives. While stressing on the linguistic aspects and the importance of output-related quality criteria, the researcher calls for taking further notice of situational particularities and background variables, pragmatic communication issues, and contextual features with a more extensive view of the profession, in addition to the methodological issues that have always been argued in interpreting quality research.

Keywords: Quality expectations, Users, Conference interpreting

Conference Interpreting has had a significant role in facilitating communications among different nations and the people of the same nation at international conferences by eliminating the language barrier. Meanwhile, the notion of “quality” has become one of the most remarkable paradigms in Interpreting Studies. Quality in interpreting, viewed as a set of perspectives, is a “function of situation, context, and variables which might call for different priorities in different interpreting situations” (Kalina, 2005, p. 771). Users’ expectations of quality in conference interpreting is accentuated by highlighting the necessity of taking their perspectives into consideration. A special attention has been drawn to such

necessity by researchers such as Seleskovitch (1986), Kurz (1993, 2001), Vuorikoski (1995), Moser (1995), Shlesinger (1997), and Grbić (2008).

For the purpose of this study linguistic and non-linguistic quality criteria including sense-consistency with original message, fluency of delivery, synchronicity, logical cohesion, appropriate style, completeness, lively intonation, pleasant voice, native accent, correct terminology, and correct grammar were implemented for evaluating quality criteria in a broad view. The importance that users attributed to each parameter determined to what extent each quality criterion is ranked as significant.

Methods

Participants

The research participants consisted of 256 “users” selected by “persuasive non-probability sampling” method (Denscombe, 2007, p. 28). As for users, speakers or listeners, only those who attended the international conference in Malaysia and received headsets to listen to the interpretation before the session started; therefore, no assessment was involved in this study and the findings were based on the users’ expectations. Users were identified and allowed to complete the questionnaires, immaterial of their background such as nationality, first language and so on.

The research participants were selected from five international conferences in Malaysia.

- 14th International Conference of Translation and the FIT 7th Asian Translators’ Forum, 27-29 August 2013, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.
- Third World Tourism Conference, 21-23 October 2013, Melaka, Malaysia.
- The 3rd Regional Conference on Educational Leadership and Management (RECLAM), 18-21 November 2013, Genting Highlands, Malaysia.
- Impact of Science on Society, 27 December 2013, Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.
- Offshore Technology Conference Asia (OTC Asia), 25-28 March 2014, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, Malaysia.

Procedure

A questionnaire-based survey study was used for evaluating users’ perspectives on quality of interpreting. The relevancy of this strategy to the overall characteristics of the study, observing the research setting, and monitoring the procedures in data collection were the reasons for adopting a survey for the purpose of the study. The research questionnaire, consisting of multiple-choice items, as well as descriptive questions enquiring the respondents’ detailed comments and perspectives, was produced by adapting questions from other significant established questionnaires that had been used in similar studies. The questions and quality criteria were mainly adopted from Bühler (1986), Moser (1995), and Zwischenberger and Pöchlacker (2010), the latter forming the major part of the questionnaire. The respondents answered a four-point scale of the eleven quality criteria. To make sure that all the question and parameters were clear, a glossary including list of the definitions of the terms for the scale items and other necessary terms was attached to the questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

The users' expectations were analysed by scale analysis of output-related quality criteria, in addition to two questions about "the most interesting aspect of interpreting from users' perspectives" and "whether users prefer to listen to the interpreting even if they understand the speaker". The degree of importance attached by users to each parameter is shown by the respective order of parameters, i.e. the percentages of very important and important attributions and the means. The following results were obtained from the scale and open-ended responses.

Users' Scale

Reliability analysis and internal consistency of the items for users was processed and the following results were obtained:

Table 1 Reliability of users' scale

		N	%
Cases	Valid	246	96.1
	Excluded (a)	10	3.9
	Total	256	100.0
Cronbach's Alpha		N of Items	
.811		11	

The reliability of the scale is indicated by the internal consistency of the items and the amount of alpha coefficient. The amount of alpha is 0.81 which is between the "acceptable" and "excellent" ranges and is considered "good" according to George and Mallery (2003, p. 231) or "ideal" (alpha above 0.7.) as Pallant (2001, p.87) suggests. Total sum of means for different parameters by users is 21.07. Therefore, the average mean of their attributions for the 11 parameters of quality for users is 1.91. Table 2 summarises the means and standard deviations of users' attributions to the quality criteria.

Table 2 The relative importance of output-related quality

Parameters	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.sense consistency with original message	256	1.00	4.00	1.50	.63
2.fluency of delivery	256	1.00	4.00	1.58	.67
3.logical cohesion	255	1.00	4.00	1.58	.65
4.correct terminology	256	1.00	3.00	1.68	.64
5.completeness	253	1.00	4.00	1.82	.77
6.correct grammar	256	1.00	4.00	1.86	.71
7.synchronicity	256	1.00	4.00	2.04	.75
8.style	254	1.00	4.00	2.09	.82
9.lively intonation	255	1.00	4.00	2.25	.79
10.pleasant voice	256	1.00	4.00	2.28	.83
11.native accent	253	1.00	4.00	2.33	.82
Valid N (listwise)	246				

Frequency of Output-related Criteria

Sense-consistency with the Original Message

The parameter of sense-consistency with the original message received the highest ratings by users as 94.1% considered it very important or important. It was marked very important by 55.9% of the users, and important by 38.3%. However, 5.1% rated sense-consistency less important and 0.8% of them considered it as unimportant.

Table 3 The relative importance of sense-consistency with original message

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid very important	143	55.9	55.9	55.9
Important	98	38.3	38.3	94.1
less important	13	5.1	5.1	99.2
unimportant	2	.8	.8	100.0
Total	256	100.0	100.0	

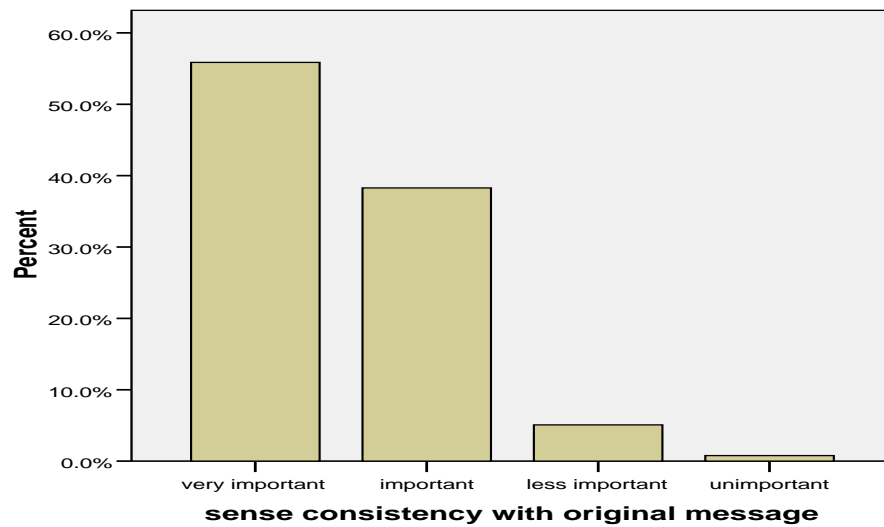


Fig. 1 The relative importance of sense-consistency

Fluency of Delivery

Fluency was marked very important or important by 91% of the users, 51.2% rating it very important and 39.8% important. Only 8.2% marked this parameter less important and 0.8% of users considered fluency unimportant.

Table 4 The relative importance of fluency of delivery

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	very important	131	51.2	51.2	51.2
	Important	102	39.8	39.8	91.0
	less important	21	8.2	8.2	99.2
	Unimportant	2	.8	.8	100.0
	Total	256	100.0	100.0	

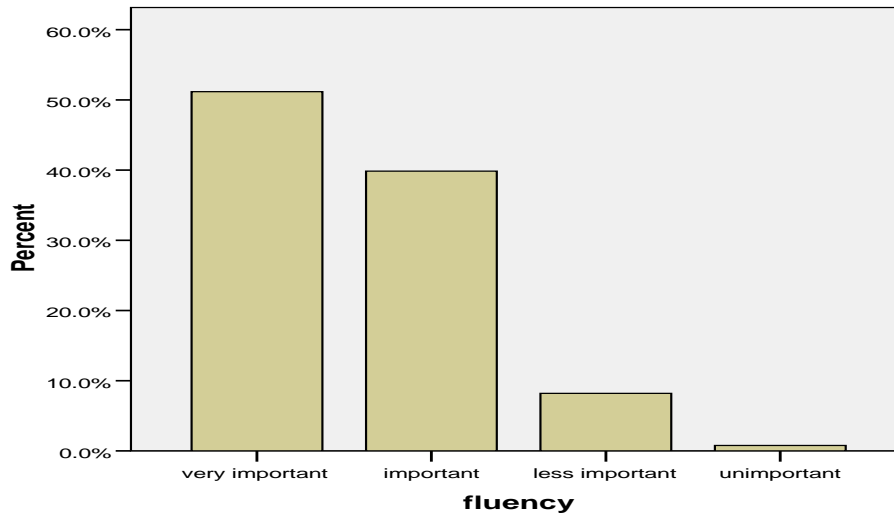


Fig 2. The relative importance of fluency

Logical Cohesion

The cumulative percent of very important and important ratings for logical cohesion was 91.4. In addition, 8.2% attributed less importance to logical cohesion, while only 0.4% considered it unimportant. Logical cohesion was placed third among all parameters with the average mean of 1.58 which is interestingly similar to the mean obtained for fluency (1.58).

Table 5 The relative importance of logical cohesion

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very important	128	50.0	50.2	50.2
	important	105	41.0	41.2	91.4
	less important	21	8.2	8.2	99.6
	unimportant	1	.4	.4	100.0
	Total	255	99.6	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.4		
Total		256	100.0		

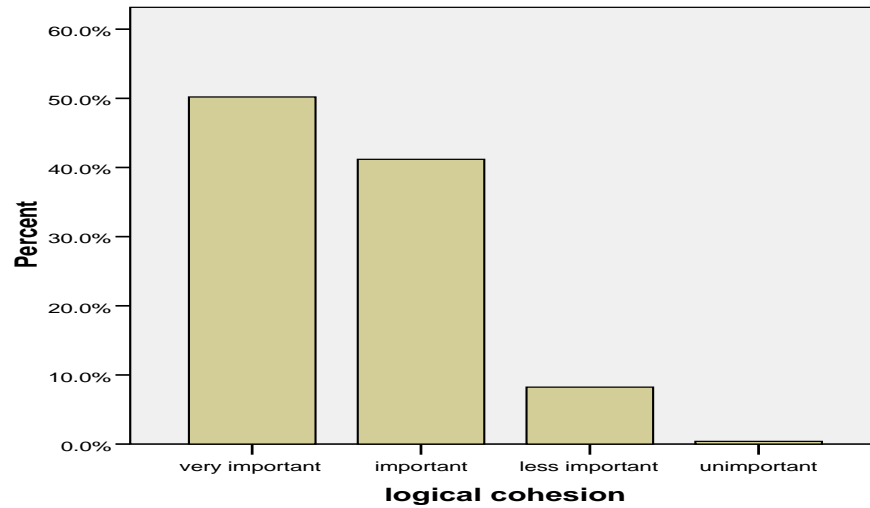


Fig. 3 The relative importance of logical cohesion

Terminology

While 89.8% of users rated terminology very important or important, 10.2% rated this criterion as less important. None of the user marked terminology unimportant.

Table 6 The relative importance of frequency of terminology

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid very important	106	41.4	41.4	41.4
Important	124	48.4	48.4	89.8
less important	26	10.2	10.2	100.0
Total	256	100.0	100.0	

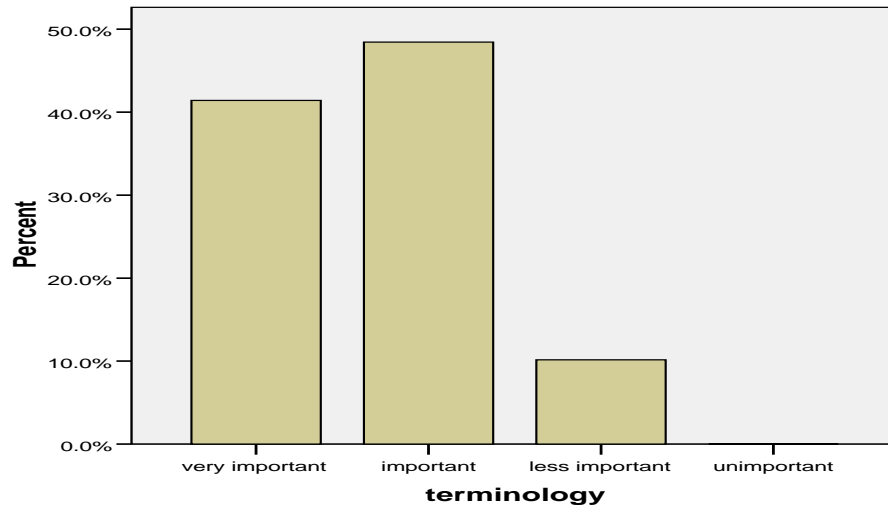


Fig 4. The relative importance of correct terminology

Completeness

Completeness was rated very important or important by 80.2% of the users. While 39.1% marked completeness very important, 41.1% marked it important. However, almost one fifth of users gave less importance attribution to completeness and 1.6% rated it as unimportant.

Table 7 The relative importance of completeness

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	very important	99	38.7	39.1	39.1
	important	104	40.6	41.1	80.2
	less important	46	18.0	18.2	98.4
	unimportant	4	1.6	1.6	100.0
	Total	253	98.8	100.0	
Missing	System	3	1.2		
Total		256	100.0		

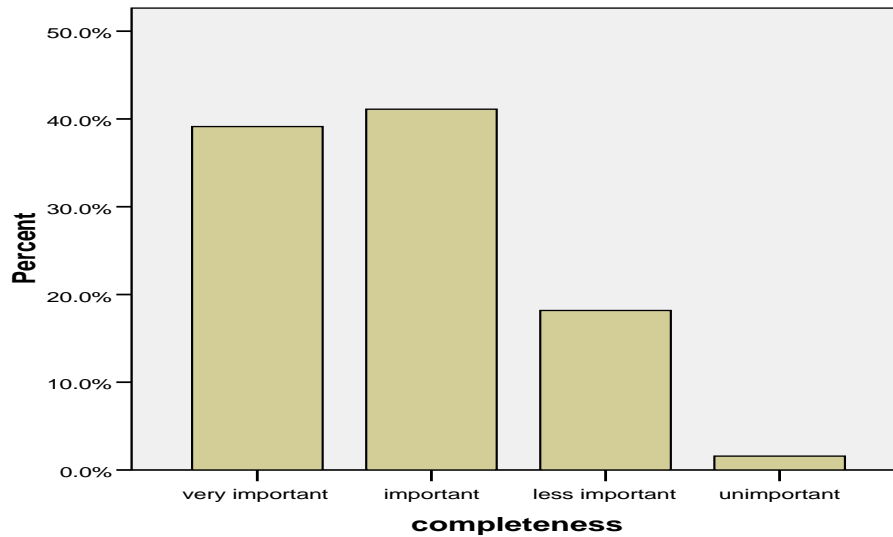


Fig 5. The relative importance of completeness

Grammar

Grammar was rated very important by 32% of users while almost half of users rated it important. Therefore, 82.8% of users considered this criterion very important or important. The less importance attribution was given by 16.0%, while 1.2% believed grammar was unimportant. The average mean for grammar was 1.86.

Table 8 The relative importance of correct grammar

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	very important	82	32.0	32.0	32.0
	important	130	50.8	50.8	82.8
	less important	41	16.0	16.0	98.8
	unimportant	3	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Total	256	100.0	100.0	

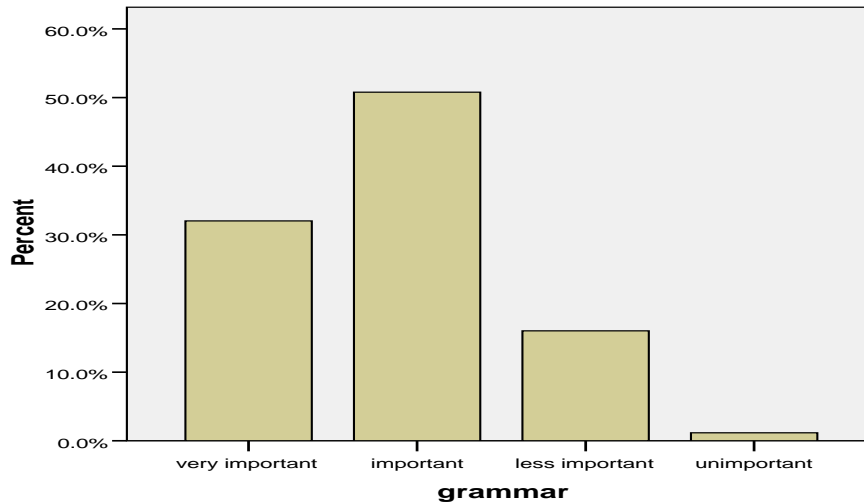


Fig 6. The relative importance of correct grammar

Synchronicity

Synchronicity was rated very important or important by 73% of all users. While 24.2% rated synchronicity very important, 48.8% rated it important. On the other hand, exactly one-fourth of the users rated synchronicity as less important, and 2.0% as unimportant. The average mean for synchronicity was 2.04.

Table 9 The relative importance of synchronicity

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	very important	62	24.2	24.2	24.2
	important	125	48.8	48.8	73.0
	less important	64	25.0	25.0	98.0
	unimportant	5	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	256	100.0	100.0	

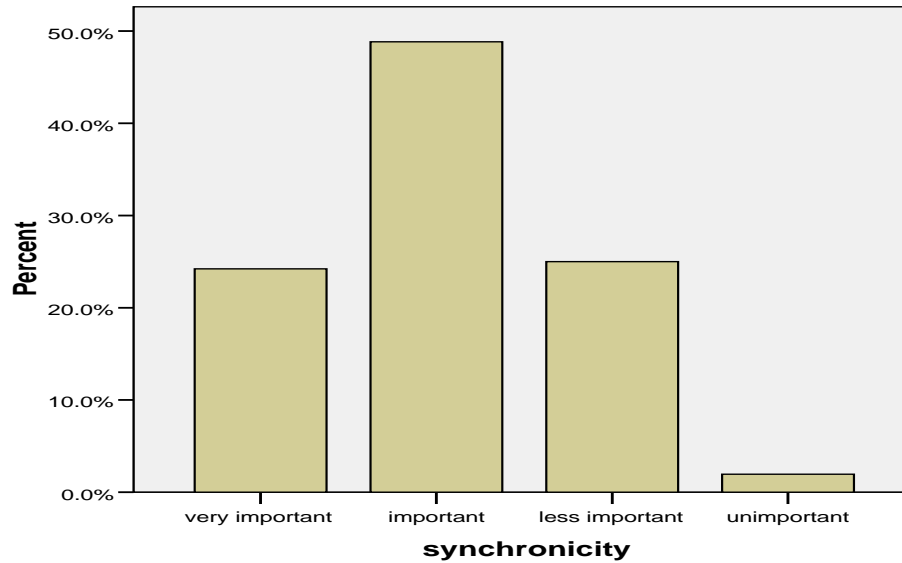


Fig 7. The relative importance of synchronicity

Style

The criterion of style was rated very important by 25.2% of users and important by 45.3% of them. Therefore, the cumulative percentage of very important and important ratings for style was 70.5%. Also, 24.8% marked style as less important and 4.7% as unimportant. For this criterion, 0.8% of ratings was missing which means they were not marked by the users. The average mean of ratings for style was 2.09.

Table 10 The relative importance of style

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	very important	64	25.0	25.2	25.2
	important	115	44.9	45.3	70.5
	less important	63	24.6	24.8	95.3
	unimportant	12	4.7	4.7	100.0
	Total	254	99.2	100.0	
Missing	System	2	.8		
Total		256	100.0		

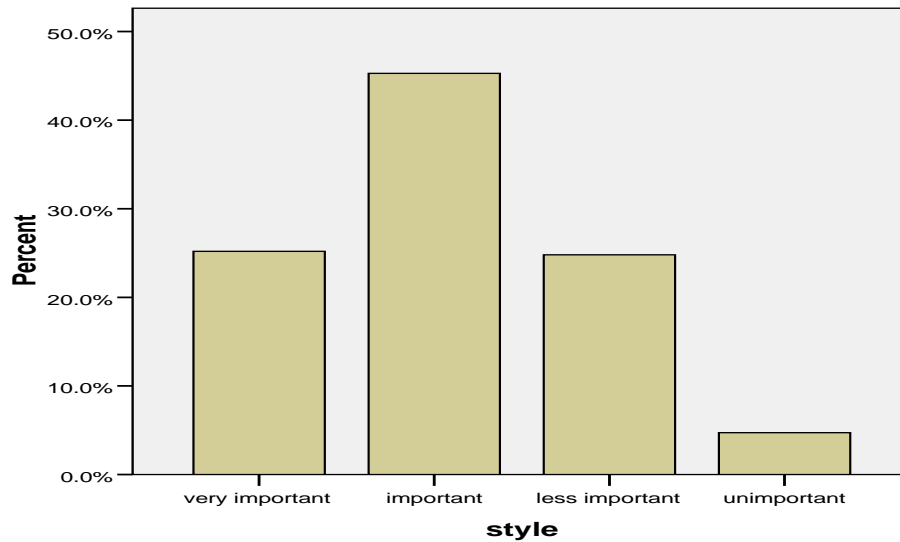


Fig 8. The relative importance of style

Lively Intonation

The cumulative percentage of very important and important attributions for lively intonation was 60.4%. Only 18% of users marked lively intonation very important and 42.4% marked it important. However, 35.7% rated intonation as less important and 3.9% as unimportant. Also, 0.4% of the rating for lively information was missing. The average mean of users' ratings for lively intonation was 2.25.

Table 11 The relative importance of lively intonation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	very important	46	18.0	18.0	18.0
	important	108	42.2	42.4	60.4
	less important	91	35.5	35.7	96.1
	unimportant	10	3.9	3.9	100.0
	Total	255	99.6	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.4		
Total		256	100.0		

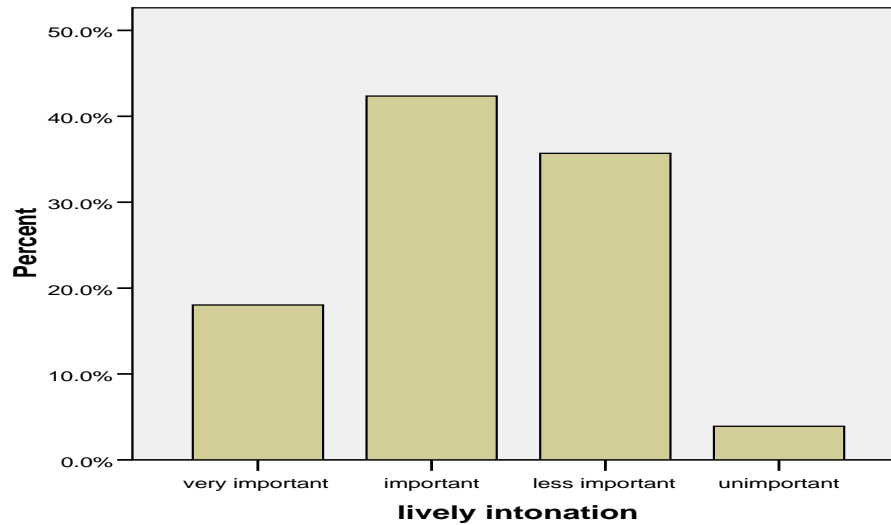


Fig 9. The relative importance of lively intonation

Pleasant Voice

Pleasant voice was rated very important or important by 60.9% of users. While 17.6% of the users gave very important attribution to pleasant voice and 43.4% rated it as important. About one-third of the users (32%) considered it less important and 7.0% rated pleasant voice as unimportant. The average mean of ratings by the users for pleasant voice was 2.28.

Table 12 The relative importance of pleasant voice

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	very important	45	17.6	17.6	17.6
	important	111	43.4	43.4	60.9
	less important	82	32.0	32.0	93.0
	unimportant	18	7.0	7.0	100.0
	Total	256	100.0	100.0	

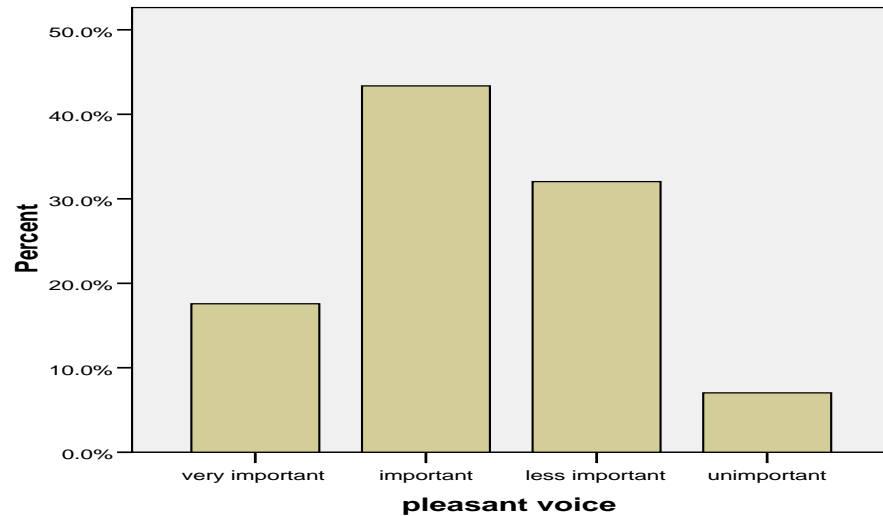


Fig 10. The relative importance of pleasant voice

Native Accent

The cumulative percentage of very important and important ratings for the parameter of native accent was 57.3. While 15.8% 41.5% marked native accent as important, 41.5% marked it important. Native accent was given less importance by 6% of users and 7.1% rated it unimportant. The missing ratings of native accent was 1.2%. The average mean of ratings for native accent was 2.33.

Table 13 The relative importance of native accent

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	very important	40	15.6	15.8	15.8
	important	105	41.0	41.5	57.3
	less important	90	35.2	35.6	92.9
	unimportant	18	7.0	7.1	100.0
	Total	253	98.8	100.0	
Missing	System	3	1.2		
Total		256	100.0		

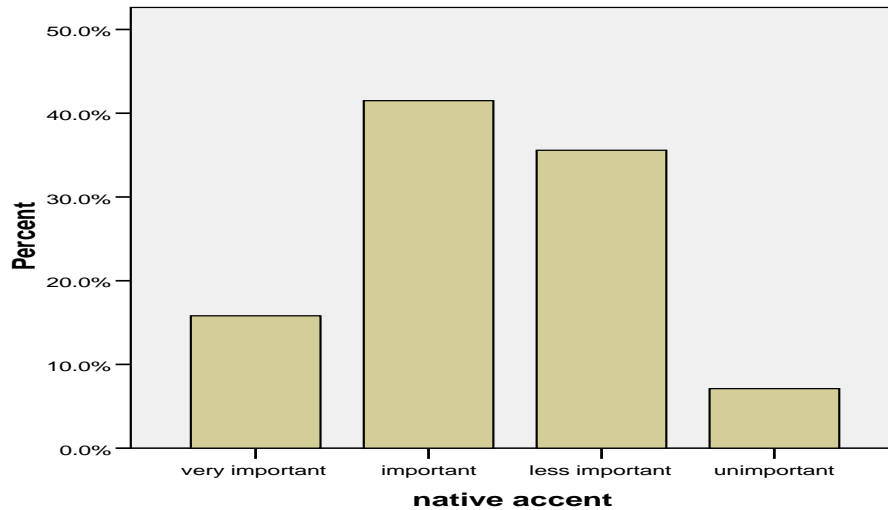


Fig 11. The relative importance of native accent

A. Analysis of the Users' Scale

The output-related quality parameters were ranked by users as follows: Sense-consistency with original message was rated as the most important criterion by 94.1% of the users ($M=1.5$, $SD=0.63$). Logical cohesion was marked as very important or important by 91.4% of the users ($M=1.58$, $SD=0.65$). Fluency of delivery came the third most important quality criterion as 91% of the users ($M=1.58$, $SD=0.67$) attached very important or important attributions to fluency. Correct terminology received 89% of the cumulative percentages of very important and important attributions ($M=1.68$, $SD=0.64$). Correct grammar was considered very important or important by 82.8% of the users ($M=1.86$, $SD=0.71$) followed by the criterion of completeness which consisted 80.2% of the users' very important and important ratings ($M=1.82$, $SD=0.77$). The importance attached to synchronicity was 73% ($M=2.04$, $SD=0.75$). Style was placed after synchronicity where it was rated very important or important by 70.5% of the users ($M=2.09$, $SD=0.82$). A lower degree of importance is attached to pleasant voice, lively intonation, and native accent. Pleasant voice received 60.9% of the very important and important attributions ($M=2.28$, $SD=0.83$), while 60.4% of the users ($M=2.25$, $SD=0.79$) rated lively intonation as very important or important. The least degree of importance was attached to native accent. Only 57.3% of the users considered native accent as very important or important ($M=2.33$, $SD=0.82$). These results are in line with Bühler's (1986) and Kurz' (1993; 2001) studies.

B. Analysis of the Users' Open-ended Responses

The open-ended questions asked the users about the most interesting aspect of interpreting and their preference to listen to the interpreting even if they understood the speaker.

The Most Interesting Aspect of Interpreting

A long list of other interesting aspects of interpreting profession is produced. On-going learning, diverse culture and scenarios, challenges, building confidence, improving language, exciting job, satisfaction, payment, bridging gaps, improving understanding, mastering several languages, getting to know others, specialised ability, and learning something new. "Wide range of topics" is considered as the most

interesting aspect of interpreting profession by 29.1% of the users. “Broadening one’s horizons” is ranked as the second most interesting aspect of interpreting by 25.2% of the users, followed by “international contacts” rated by 24.3% of the users, and “employee benefits” rated by 17.5% of the users. Also, 3.9% of the users indicated challenges as the most interesting aspect of interpreting profession.

Users’ Preference to Listen to the Interpreting

More than half of the users (51.6%) would “sometimes” listen to the interpretation out of interest or curiosity even if they understood the speaker. On the other hand, the number of those users who answered “no” or “almost always” were identical (19.6%).

Conclusion

The effort to form, consolidate, and enhance the understanding of interpreting quality in conference interpreting setting and such understanding helps promote the quality of interpreting service provided for the different parties involved in conference interpreting. The better quality of interpreting service at these conferences brings about the satisfaction of the users, as the “customers” of the conference interpreting; therefore, this can boost the conference industry and eventually achieve a plethora of economic, social, cultural, and political advantages for any country.

Users considering “wide range of topics” as the most interesting aspect of conference interpreting view interpreters as highly qualified professionals with substantial knowledge who work and function in complex environments which can host vague expectations and even contradictory interests. In addition, the percentages of the users’ preference to listen to the interpretation even if they understood the speaker suggest that even though users might be able to understand the speakers, they are still willing to listen to the interpretation.

However, it could be argued that the expectations and parameters ranked by conference participants rely excessively on situational context and those respondents’ previous experience of using interpreting service in other conferences. The picture formed through those experiences might have been overemphasised for some people. For instance, if they have experienced an interpreter’s irritating voice they might rate pleasant voice as the most important criterion. However, it was not possible to test this hypothesis within the framework of the present study. It was noted that the principal expectations remain almost constant for different conference types with only a subtle difference of priorities. Nevertheless, the fundamental question regarding the methodology of research in conference area is whether there is actually a practical way to guarantee an on-site survey evaluating expectations on interpreting quality? And whether users’ expectations vary markedly in different circumstances such as different conference types or they have predetermined expectations applicable to all situations?

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