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Review Article

Remote Interpreting from a Multimodal Perspective—A Case Study of Remote Simultaneous Interpreting

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Abstract

In recent years, against the backdrop of the rapid development of telecommunication tools as well as the onset and continued existence of COVID-19, the way people communicate has been greatly changed. In cross-cultural and multi-lingual settings, remote interpreting is playing an increasingly important role, and for interpreters, the way of obtaining information becomes multi-dimensional as the source texts come in various modes. The paper, therefore, intends to observe the performance of a professional simultaneous interpreter at an online world dental conference, with the focus on how the interpreter deals with multimodal source information and the subsequent interpreting strategies. It is hoped that the research could provide insights on multimodal interpreting research and suggestions for better remote interpreting practices in the future.

Keywords: Remote interpreting, simultaneous interpreting, multimodal analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

In order to improve efficiency and reduce cost, language service providers have adopted various methods in multilingual communication, and video conference interpreting that breaks geographical and time constraints has emerged. Video conference first appeared in the early 1990s, and has developed rapidly in the following decades. Remote interpreting saves money for conference organizers and saves time for interpreters, but at the same time, it also brings new challenges to interpreters. How to improve the quality of translators and remote interpreting has become an issue that should be considered by the academic community. This article will introduce multi-modality and its application in translation studies, the forms and characteristics of remote interpreting, and analyze the application of multi-modality in remote interpreting with examples.

2. Multimodality and its application in translation studies

The development of science and technology, especially the rapid development of digital technology, has profoundly changed the way people communicate. The emergence of various instant messaging tools and social software has enriched communicative behavior, and allows for the possibility of communicating over computer screens. Under these circumstances, para-linguistic features of languages and elements other than pure voices have caught researchers' attention, but there is still a significant research gap. According to Zhu Yongsheng (2007), discourse analysis so far is basically limited to language in its narrower sense that is, only paying attention to the language system and semantic structure itself and its relationship with social culture and psychological cognition, ignoring other signs such as images, sounds, colors, animations, etc. It was not until the 1990s that the multimodal discourse analysis which emerged in the West can help people overcome these limitations to a large extent.

In terms of definition, modal refers to "the way that humans interact with the external environment (such as humans, machines, objects, animals, etc.) through their senses (such as sight, hearing, etc.)". If two or more modalities are involved in an interactive activity, it is called multimodality. Multimodality is basically the coexistence of multiple symbolic modalities in a specific text (Gibbons, 2012:8).

Multimodality can refer to the different symbolic modalities in an exchange product or communication activity (Van Leeuwen, 2005:281). The mixture can also refer to various ways of mobilizing different symbol resources to jointly construct meaning in a specific text (Baldry, Thibault, 2006:21).

In turn, multimodal discourse refers to the coexistence of language and other symbolic resources to jointly construct meaning. Whether it is spoken or written, the use of language is always inevitably constituted by multiple modes of communication. Therefore, in a sense, all discourses are multimodal discourses (Kress, Van Leeuwen, 1998:186).

In the study of Kress and Leeuwen, grammar is extended to include visual patterns. They believe that: "Just as the grammar of a language determines how words form clauses, sentences, and texts, visual grammar will describe the characters, places, and texts depicted. How things make up visual `statements' with varying degrees of complexity."(Kress, Van Leeuwen, 1996:1).

After nearly 20 years of development, on the one hand, the interdisciplinary multimodal research theoretical system has been gradually improved and applied to explain various complex multimodal discourses; on the other hand, the multimodal corpus based on science and technology Empirical research, such as behavioral experiments, has gradually emerged (Feng, 2017:6).

Since the 1990s, based on Halliday's systematic functional linguistics, researchers have extended the scope of discourse analysis to other fields besides text, that is, extended the single-mode discourse analysis method to multi-mode discourse analysis, not only language modalities are analyzed, but also symbol systems such as technology, images, colors, and music are also concerned. Multi-modality can refer to any text that has more than one conforming coding, for example, text with images, sounds, diagrams, to achieve meaning. It can be seen that in daily life, absolutely monomodal discourse is rare, while multimodal discourse is widespread. For example, when people talk with gestures and facial expressions, they can see text and pictures on a web page, and they can also hear the background music. Language is a tool and means of human communication, but it is definitely not the only tool and means.

At present, there are three main approaches to multimodal research: social semiotics approach (Kress, Van Leeuwen, 1996), systemic functional linguistic approach (O'Toole, 1994), and conversational analysis approach (Goodwin 1981, 2000).

In terms of interpreting, multimodal discourse analysis mainly studies the three modalities of the speaker's language modality (including language, paralanguage such as phonetic intonation, gestures, etc.), text modality and image modalities on slides, to guide the interpreter in the future on how to translate properly in a remote video conference.

3. REMOTE INTERPRETING

According to Braun's definition (2011), remote interpreting refers to interpreting activities that use remote communication technology. According to the different communication media, it can be divided into Video-Mediated Interpreting and Telephone-Mediated Interpreting. Video interpreting includes Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) and Videoconference Interpreting (VCI).

Remote interpreting also has some advantages that traditional interpreting does not have. Under the premise that the transmission signal can be guaranteed, the interpreter can see the speaker, images, text, video information, etc. more clearly.

That being said, remote meetings bring many challenges to the interpreter, that is, the feeling of "absence", which is caused by the physical distance between the interpreter and the scene, and the feeling of "distance" and "loss of control". For interpreters, "the sense of being there" or "the sense of presence" is an important condition to ensure the smooth progress of interpreting (Yao, 2011). The effectiveness of virtual environments is usually related to the presence reported by users of these environments. Presence can be defined as the subjective experience of being in one place or environment, even if a person's physical location is in another (Witmer, Singer, 1998).

Compared with traditional interpreting, remote interpreting has the characteristics of "off-site", "timeliness", "low cost" and "high demand for interpreters" (Liu & Wei, 2017). The main form of remote interpreting is simultaneous interpreting (Yao, 2011). Cognitive psychology research on the process of simultaneous interpreting shows that it is a typical "multitasking job" and a cognitive processing process (Moser-Mercer, 2005:728).

In this era, new forms of communication are emerging one after another, and the field of interpreting has also undergone tremendous changes. Not only have many new translation methods appeared, but the forms of source language texts have become more and more complex and diverse (Dicerto, 2018). Therefore, besides paying attention to the information conveyed by the "language" per se, the information conveyed by other modalities is also an indispensable clue for interpreters. Studying how information in other modes interacts with information communicated orally can help interpreters understand and translate better.

In addition, for simultaneous interpreting, prediction is one of the important strategies for translators to deal with various situations on the spot, and it is also an important means for them to allocate and save cognitive resources (Moser-Mercer, 2005:732). During the work process, in order to better predict, the interpreter should also observe the speaker's non-verbal behavior and the various happenings on the spot (Yao, 2011). With the help of observation, the interpreter can supplement the lack of language information and predict the situation, information, and topics that will appear.

4. CASE ANALYSIS

The following section selects some typical cases of interpreting from a professional interpreter in an online dental conference for analysis. The speaker is from the Director Department of Periodontology, Dental School, University of Giessen, Germany. And a German, he speaks in his heavily accented English. The main topic of this congress is how to improve the early detection and diagnosis of periodontal diseases. In the 20-minute speech, he introduces the procedure of diagnosing a patient: doctors will ask the anamnesis at first, have a clinical assessment to see the restorations, biofilm, probing pocket depth, examine bleeding upon probing, have a radiographic examination, and maybe they will exercise the advanced adjunctive diagnostic procedures. Then he gives four examples to show how to manage periodontal diseases.

The author transcribed the spoken language into text according to linguistic rules and produced case corpus. Some linguistic signs are used in the transcription of the audio: ":" signifies hesitation and short pauses, "{}" signifies that the speaker speeds up, "}{" signifies that the speaker slows down. "[]" marks non-verbal information, and "(.)" marks a very short pause.

Through analyzing the material, the author has examined the performance of the interpreter and come up with several suggestions: the interpreter should add cohesive sentences, transitional sentences, and logical words when it is necessary; the interpreter should always observe the speaker's paralanguage such as expressions and actions. In addition, the interpreter can make logical inferences based on other modal information besides the language, so that the sentence is clear. If the interpreter does not understand the speaker at all, sight interpreting is a good choice. These suggestions can be best illustrated by the following four cases:

Case 1

Source text

Ladies and gentlemen, this is something which I would like to ask you and you can answer it by yourself: would you probe this patient? Fine, thank you [smile, look around, nod]. I don't want to see how many, but I hope that it is a majority. We have to probe the patient because we cannot see the state of the periodontal situation without probing. because part of the periodontium is not visible. we just see the gingival surface. We don't see the situation underneath the surface and then if you probe the patient, then we suddenly realize that there is something going on.

Interpreted text

大家可以我问一个问题大家可以想一下，你们会探诊吗?呃谢谢，谢谢大家的回答，我不想说我到底能看到多少，但是我希望大部分的人回答都是肯定的，是的，我们是要对这个病人进行探诊的,因为.我们.是.不探诊是搞不清楚她的牙周状况的，因为有一些牙周炎是看不到的，我们是看不到它的整个表面的变化的，如果我们探诊的话呢，就会意识到确实她是存在牙周疾病的。

Analysis

Here, the speaker asks the participants of the conference in a relaxed tone whether the patient should be probed if his/her oral condition looks very healthy. He does not give the audience time to respond, instead, he says thank you directly. After that, the speaker smiles, looks around from left to right with a nodding, and then says: "I hope that it is a majority." The speaker does not specify which point of view he hopes to hold as the majority, but by observing his facial expression and movements, the interpreter knows that looking around and nodding mean symbolically counting, smiling is hoping to get an affirmative answer, so the interpreter deals it as "But I hope most people will answer in the affirmative." Here, the non-verbal elements including the facial expression and the movement of the head serve as important clues for the interpreter to identify and follow the logic of the speech, and helps the interpreter choose the appropriate strategy of adding relevant information.

Case 2

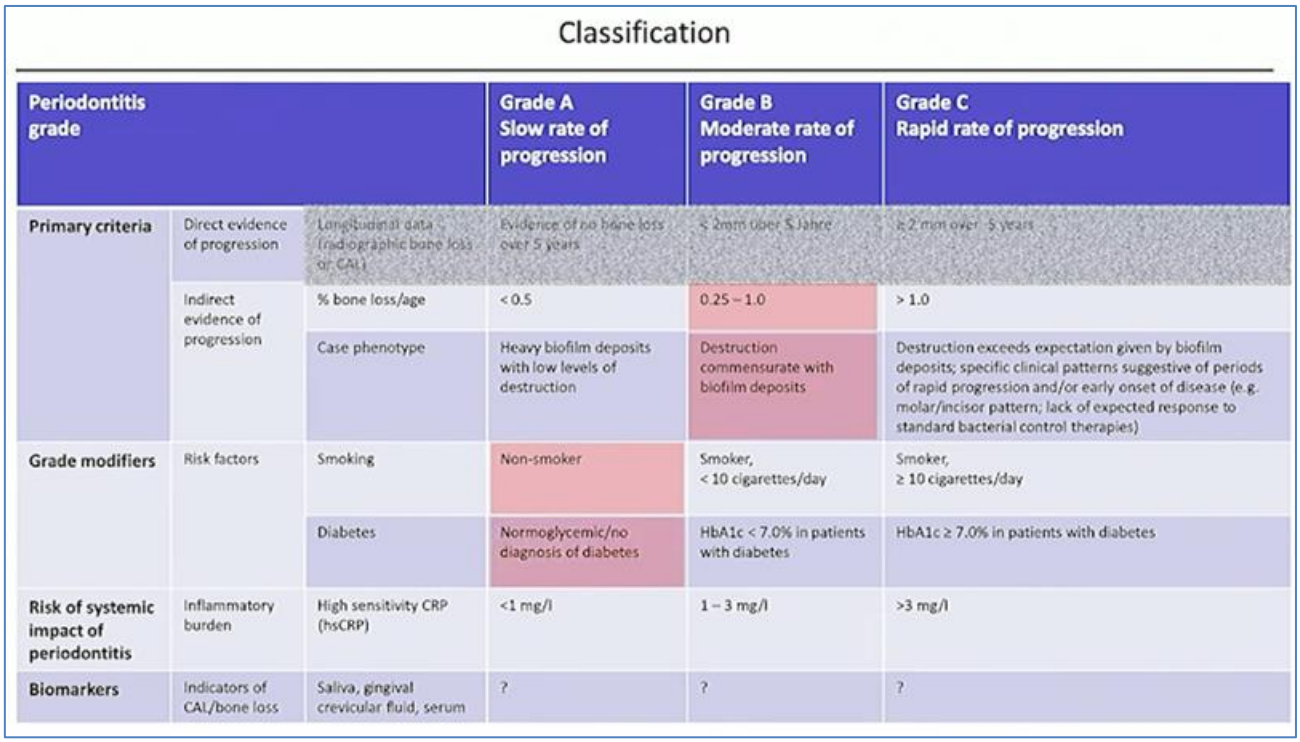
Source text

Then we get err, err… a parameter of 1.04, which means that this is a grade B, moderate rate of progression and if we then look further on, we see the destruction is commensurate with biofilm deposits. the patient is a nonsmoker. He is not glycemic, he is not a diabetic, he doesn't suffer from diabetes and so in this case, we have a great tool as a third diagnostic parameter.

Interpreted text

考虑一下这个参数我们最终得到的是一个 1.04，所以 1.04 它其实是这个病情进展的速度是适中的，啊同时我们会看到牙齿的这个破坏情况，跟生物膜（.）上面的沉积状况相伴，同时我们考虑到其他的评级因素，就是说（.）这个病人他不吸烟，他血

糖水平正常，没有患糖尿病，所以综合起来所有的因素呀，我们：呃可以看到他是处于这个第三类（.）的这个参数系统。



Classification

Periodontitis grade			Grade A Slow rate of progression	Grade B Moderate rate of progression	Grade C Rapid rate of progression
Primary criteria	Direct evidence of progression	Longitudinal data (radiographic bone loss or CAL)	Evidence of no bone loss over 5 years	< 2mm über 5 Jahre	≥ 2 mm over 5 years
	Indirect evidence of progression	% bone loss/age	< 0.5	0.25 – 1.0	> 1.0
		Case phenotype	Heavy biofilm deposits with low levels of destruction	Destruction commensurate with biofilm deposits	Destruction exceeds expectation given by biofilm deposits; specific clinical patterns suggestive of periods of rapid progression and/or early onset of disease (e.g. molar/incisor pattern; lack of expected response to standard bacterial control therapies)
Grade modifiers	Risk factors	Smoking	Non-smoker	Smoker, < 10 cigarettes/day	Smoker, ≥ 10 cigarettes/day
		Diabetes	Normoglycemic/no diagnosis of diabetes	HbA1c < 7.0% in patients with diabetes	HbA1c ≥ 7.0% in patients with diabetes
Risk of systemic impact of periodontitis	Inflammatory burden	High sensitivity CRP (hsCRP)	<1 mg/l	1 – 3 mg/l	>3 mg/l
Biomarkers	Indicators of CAL/bone loss	Saliva, gingival crevicular fluid, serum	?	?	?

Analysis

The speaker says “we have a great tool as a third diagnostic parameter.” If we consider the primary criteria, for example, the age, bone loss and the case phenotype, the patient will be graded as the moderate rate of progression. But if we refer to the risk factor, the result will be a slow rate of progression. Therefore, we will find that we cannot simply grade the patient as Grade A or Grade B, at this time, we should consult another classification. But due to the limited time and great pressure, the interpreter can only transfer whatever she listens, so she does not catch the logic and translates the original message literally into “我们可以看到他是处于这个第三类的这个参数系统”. Instead of “the patient is in the third category of this parameter system,” the original text is rather like “we should introduce a new criterion to categorize this patient.” Thus, the correct translation should be “所以在这起病例中，我们要参考第三种诊断参数”. In addition, if we see the form in the slide directly, we will find the highlighted parts are in two different columns, which means the interpreter can infer there is a third parameter to uniform the result of the periodontitis grade according to the visual information alone. Here, the non-verbal elements include the visual information-mainly the red color to mark the patient’s condition-and the text, and while listening to the speech the interpreter should also focus on these modalities to check her translation.

That said, it is praiseworthy that the interpreter observes the form-the names of parameter are listed and the visual information is easy to obtain-and adds“同时我们考虑到其他的评级因素”as a cohesive device.

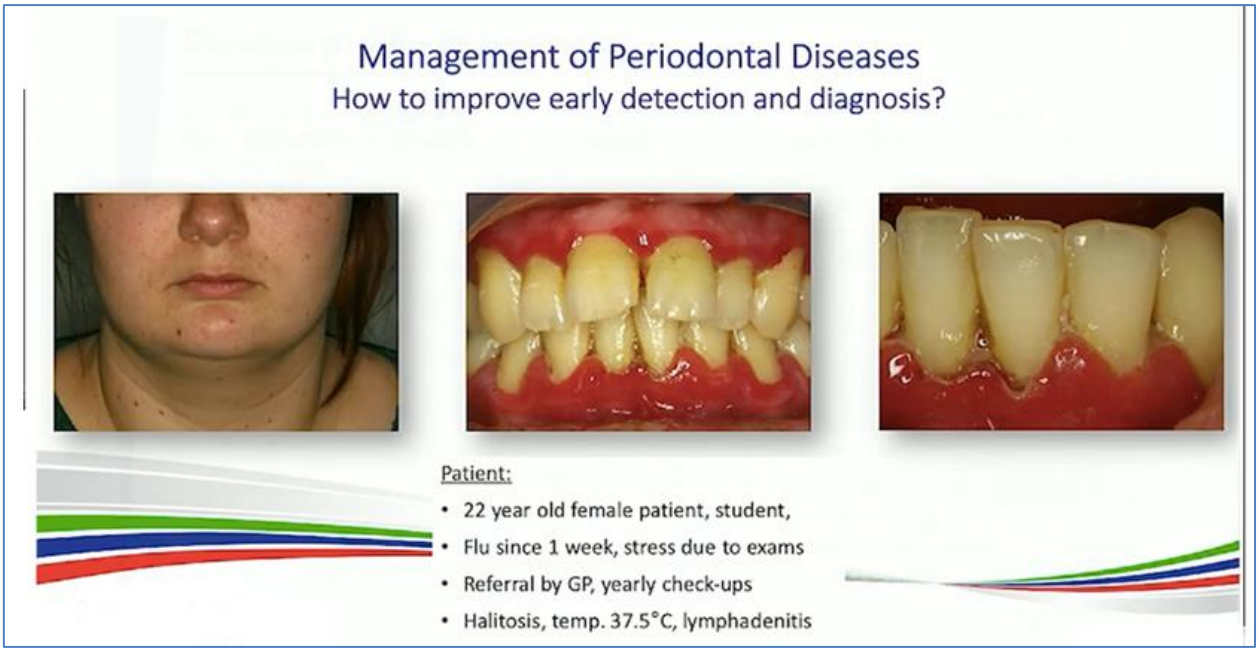
Case 3

Source text

She was referred to us by the general practitioner, the early check-ups, [text on the slides shows the personal profile of this patient] she had halitosis and elevated temperature and the lymphadenitis in the submandibular lymph nodes, and as you can see it's a highly acute inflammatory reaction around her teeth. we see this punched appearance, which tells us that this is necrotizing periodontitis.

Interpreted text

她的这个全科医生建议她来找我们看牙，呃，她每年也都做检查，{她有口臭，呃，这个温度是 37 度 5，}能摸到她的淋巴结，}你可以看到这个照片上显示的是非常严重的炎症反应，我们可以看到这个呃照片上的这个状况，啊，就是淋巴炎和牙周炎，所以我们在这张图片上可以看到她的上颌下颌等等的这个口腔状况。{



Analysis

We can see that when the speaker says "elevated temperature" the interpreter renders it into " 温度是 37 度 5". Where does this piece of information come from? The truth is the interpreter has noticed that the speaker is reading the text in the slides, so she speeds up to translate the information without hesitation.

It is wise for the interpreter to use the text to save energy, but what is noteworthy is that the interpreter had better balance the auditory information and the visual information, especially pay attention to the pause, the topic change and the introduction of new information, because we can easily find that the interpreter apparently slows down her translation after the sight interpreting. The visual input disturbs her flow, and perhaps she does not hear the following sentences clearly, so the interpreting is in slight disorder, but fortunately comprehensible. The author will give her translation: 她有淋巴腺炎，在下颌下的淋巴结中，你可以看到一个非常严重的炎症反应在她的牙齿周围。这里的肿胀表现出这是一个坏死性的牙周炎。

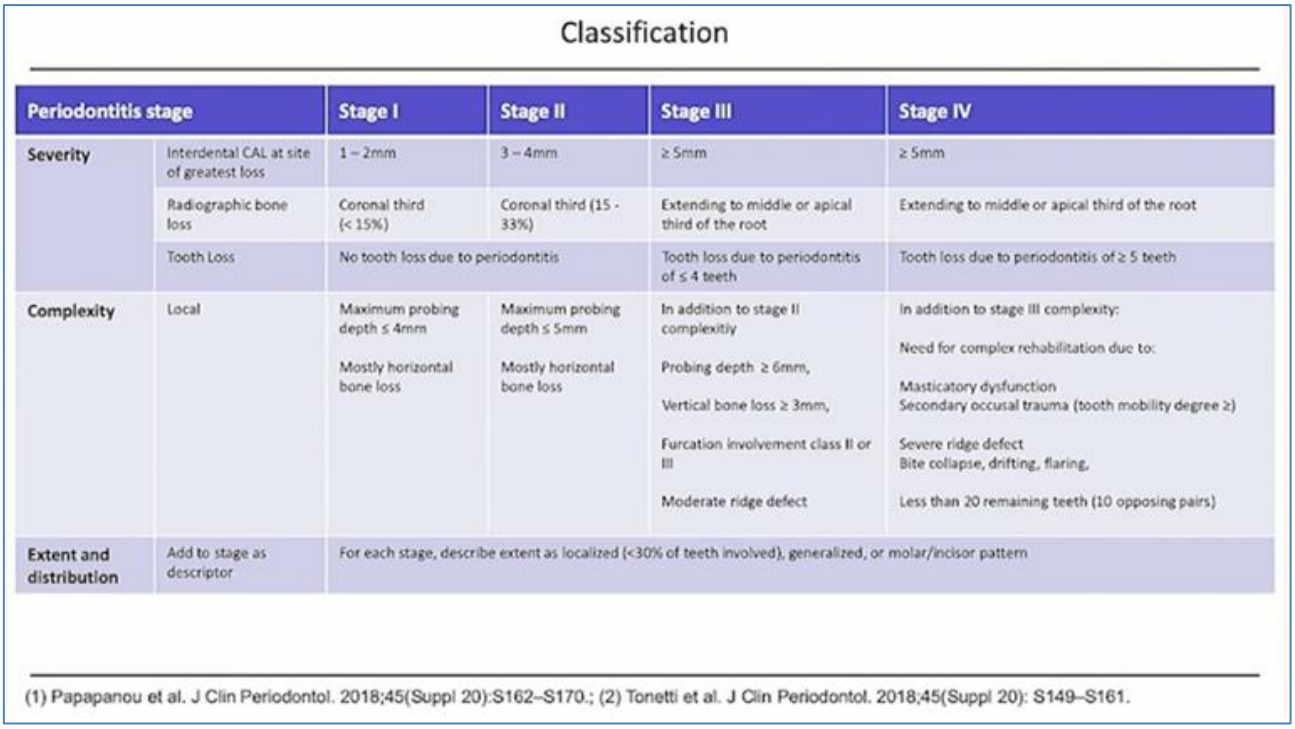
Case 4

Source text

Then we have to refer to the radiographic bone loss, which was extending to the middle or apical part of the bone of the tooth. you see this at the different sites here in the radiographs. and so we assign this to the stage 3 and 4. and if we are looking for the tooth loss the patient had not have, had tooth loss due to periodontitis. but we see that we have probing depth above 6 millimeters, we have radical bone loss above 3 millimeters, and we have also furcation involvement class II, which gives us a staging of stage three in this case. and it's a generalized disease.

Interpreted text

我们可以再去考虑一下牙槽骨吸收，嗯它是在中部还有这个牙尖的地方，我们可以看到在（.）不同的部位，这个放射照片上都显示出来了，所以说，她这个病例呢其实已经到了第三期和第四期，（2）但是她：因为她：这个病人并没有因为牙周疾病而产生失牙，所以给她评到了一期和二期。但是从复杂程度来看呢，探诊深度是大于六毫米，呃，垂直骨丧失呢是超过了三毫米，同时还存在牙根分叉的病变，是二级和三级。（3）所以：总体来说，啊她是符合这个牙周病牙周炎的这个诊断标准。



Classification

Periodontitis stage		Stage I	Stage II	Stage III	Stage IV
Severity	Interdental CAL at site of greatest loss	1 – 2mm	3 – 4mm	≥ 5mm	≥ 5mm
	Radiographic bone loss	Coronal third (< 15%)	Coronal third (15 - 33%)	Extending to middle or apical third of the root	Extending to middle or apical third of the root
	Tooth Loss	No tooth loss due to periodontitis		Tooth loss due to periodontitis of ≤ 4 teeth	Tooth loss due to periodontitis of ≥ 5 teeth
Complexity	Local	Maximum probing depth ≤ 4mm Mostly horizontal bone loss	Maximum probing depth ≤ 5mm Mostly horizontal bone loss	In addition to stage II complexity Probing depth ≥ 6mm, Vertical bone loss ≥ 3mm, Furcation involvement class II or III Moderate ridge defect	In addition to stage III complexity: Need for complex rehabilitation due to: Masticatory dysfunction Secondary occusal trauma (tooth mobility degree ≥) Severe ridge defect Bite collapse, drifting, flaring, Less than 20 remaining teeth (10 opposing pairs)
Extent and distribution	Add to stage as descriptor	For each stage, describe extent as localized (<30% of teeth involved), generalized, or molar/incisor pattern			

(1) Papapanou et al. J Clin Periodontol. 2018;45(Suppl 20):S162–S170.; (2) Tonetti et al. J Clin Periodontol. 2018;45(Suppl 20): S149–S161.

Analysis

Comparing and analyzing the speech of the speaker and the translation of the interpreter, we will find that there is a big difference between the original text and the translated text. The author also communicates with the interpreter and confirms that the interpreter does not understand this paragraph at that time, so she analyzes the radiographic pictures and classification form in the slides, and directly translates the text according to the key points marked by the speaker.

To start with, the speaker says "if we are looking for the tooth loss the patient had not have, had tooth loss due to periodontitis." This sentence seeming incomplete and not very clear, we can recognize there is an obvious hesitation before the interpreter speaks. Maybe the reason why there is a pause is that she has not responded yet, so the interpreter chooses to translate the information from the form and grade the patient as stage 1 and 2 by Tooth Loss. Here, the interpreter's process provides us with a way of thinking: when the speaker's language information is fragmented and the interpreter has no idea where to start, or cannot understand, or cannot keep up with the speech, he/she can locate the corresponding pictures, text, videos, etc. and translate the visual information straightway.

Still, the shining point lies in the adding of transitional sentence, and it is all due to the visual information-the text in the slide. The speaker comes to the next line, introduces the probing depth, radical bone loss, and furcation involvement class. Before interpreting this part, the interpreter adds "by Complexity" because she notices that the classification form has already listed the standards, and adding this can make the speech coherent.

5. CONCLUSION

It can be seen that of all the interpreting cases analyzed, some are handled successfully or even brilliantly, and some are barely satisfactory. From the analysis, it's safe to deduce that when interpreting a remote meeting, interpreters should focus not only on the speaker's language, but also on the speaker's paralinguistic information such as voice, intonation, gestures, and actions, as well as non-linguistic clues such as the information in the slides such as text, pictures, and forms. Interpreters should quickly integrate all this information, make judgments, and choose appropriate translation strategies, such as addition, deletion, and coherence. Hopefully, the analysis of these selected cases can provide some reference in the multimodal perspective for remote interpreting in the future.

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