Simultaneous interpreting was more than once labeled as one of the most requiring jobs there is. In our study we hypothesize that simultaneous interpreters would have a larger attention span than a control group performing a similar demanding task. Simultaneous interpreters (N=7) and the control group (N=17) were instructed to shadow the speaker in a video sequence where he was giving a speech surrounded by 20 different objects, to press a button when looking into the camera and to press another button when the speaker pronounced proper names creating a situation of significant cognitive load similar to one experienced by simultaneous interpreters. Both groups were later presented with a recall test (20 target stimuli, 40 distractors) and comprehension questions. We did not find any difference in recall test performance between the groups (U Mann-Whitney, p=0.13), but interestingly interpreters were worse at identifying distractors than the control group (mixed-effects linear model, p=0.042) and better at identifying target stimuli (p=0.054, Task type X Picture type interaction, p=0.03). Moreover, both groups were making more mistakes in target stimuli identification compared to distractors (p<0.001). The results could be an indication that interpreter perception filters are tilted towards accumulating more incoming information than those of a person without simultaneous interpreting training.

The study was supported by Russian Foundation for Humanities, grant number 15-06-10894_a and RFBR, grant number 16-06-00501_a

Keywords: simultaneous interpreting, attention span, cognitive load.