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Effective Teaching Strategies of Consecutive Interpreting to Facilitate Cross-Cultural Communication

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Abstract

We live in an age of increasing international communication where people from different backgrounds and cultures and who speak different languages find themselves coming together to discuss issues of all kinds; i.e. economic, political, legal cultural, technical, etc. Usually in intercontinental dialogue and cross-culture communications people belonging to different languages and cultures are brought together and these people are certainly anxious to communicate effectively and be fully and clearly understood by others. However, if they are not fully competent in the languages of communication; i.e. Source Language (SL) and Target Language (TL), here emerges the importance of interpreters to facilitate communication between people who speak different languages and serve as a bridge between different cultures. As long as "Comparatively little research has been done on interpreting throughout history" (Phelan, 2001, p. 1) and due to my long experience in teaching and practicing consecutive interpreting for more than 30 years, my paper mainly aims to present some effective strategies in teaching consecutive interpreting so as to contribute to high standards of professionalism and quality of interpretation that are essential prerequisites for facilitating intercontinental dialogue and cross-culture communication. The paper is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the three basic stages involved in consecutive interpreting; i.e. understanding the message, analysis, and re-expression. The second part deals with the process of note-taking; i.e. difficulties, what to note, how to note, language of note taking, tools used in note taking, etc.

Keywords: cross-cultural communication, effective teaching strategies of consecutive interpreting, basic stages and principles of interpreting, note-taking process and techniques.

Introduction

An interpreter is what we might call a 'communication professional'**.** His role is to help people come together and understand one another. An interpreter is a communication bridge between people separated by culture as well as by language. He helps people to understand one another by providing explanations and information where requisite. In other words, he "… must bridge the cultural and conceptual gap separating the participants in a meeting.' (Jones, 2002, p.4) It must be taken into consideration that an interpreter is not only a translator but "an intercultural mediator" (Bassnet, 2005, p.4), as well. There is no doubt that the interpreting activity is highly diverse and once we consider the work of the interpreter, we should be "…aware of the multifarious nature of the activity" (Basil & Mason, 2001, p.1). Similar to translation, interpretation, whether consecutive or simultaneous, should be viewed "… as a communicative process which takes place within a social context" (Basil & Masson, 2002, p.3).

This paper adopts a practical approach to consecutive interpreting that mainly targets to present the effective strategies that should be followed in teaching consecutive interpreting to ensure at the end having highly professional and fully competent interpreters. However, this research is not going to discuss the relationship between independent variables, such as time pressures and complexity of text, and dependent variables; i.e. interpretation quality (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2013).

As a starting point in the interpreting process, the interpreter should listen to the speech delivered by someone while taking notes. Whenever the speaker ends his speech, the interpreter's role begins; i.e. he begins to deliver the speech in the target language. However, it should be noted that interpreting does not mean summing up the text, but it is complete rendering of the Source Text (ST) into the Target Text (TT). The consecutive interpreter must be highly efficient in dealing with any length of speech and in the meantime be very cautious that his interpretation must not take longer time than the original speech. As a rule of a thumb, it is highly recommended that "… [he] should aim at taking three-quarters of the time taken by the original" (Jones, 2002, p.5).

In addition to the knowledge of the languages, there are other skills involved in the interpreting process; that is to say "…memory, concentration and understanding" (Phelan, 2001, p. 9). Last to be said and not least that note-taking is a crucial factor in consecutive interpreting and interpreters should develop their own techniques.

The main focus in this paper is to present the basic stages and principles involved in consecutive interpreting, as well as, the note-taking process and techniques.

The Basic Stages and Principles of Consecutive Interpretation

Usually when anyone wants to express certain ideas, he must have them clear in his mind so as to express them clearly and effectively. In other words, if one wishes to re-express or reproduce someone's ideas without repeating them word for word, then one must make a clear, structural analysis of them (Jones, 2002, p.11). The same thing applies to the interpreter who has to analyze and understand the individual ideas involved in the speakers speech. In addition, the more the interpreter is knowledgeable about the subject matter he is interpreting, the greater capacity he will have to retain the information and retrieve the original message.

In short, we can say that the three basic stages involved in consecutive interpreting are understanding, analyzing, and re-expressing or reproducing (Jones, 2002, p.11). Now we will discuss each of these stages in turn.

Stage One: *Understanding*

The 'understanding' that we focus on here is not of words but of ideas, for it is ideas that have to be interpreted. In other words, the interpreter "… should be concerned with meaning rather than exact equivalents for individual words" (Phelan, 2001.p.7).Undoubtedly, no one can understand ideas if he/she does not know the words the speaker is using to express them, or if the grammar and syntax of the speaker's language is unfamiliar. 'Not knowing words', as we have said, should not be considered a serious problem as the interpreter has to understand ideas, not words. Moreover, it is perfectly possible to understand the speakers' meaning without actually understanding every single word and expression they use, and without having to reproduce all of these terms and expressions in the interpretation. In other words, interpreting is possible without all the words and without changing the meaning.

However, there are occasions when a word is too important to ignore or skip. In this case, the interpreter has to deduce or guess its meaning from context.

In short, we can say that it is possible for the interpreters to work perfectly well without knowing in advance all the vocabulary used by the speakers. However, there are times when interpreters do not know a word or an expression and can neither avoid it nor deduce its meaning; i.e. they are facing a real problem. In such a case, the interpreters have to ask the speaker about the meaning. This is quite acceptable as any interpreter cannot be expected to be a walking multilingual dictionary and there are things which he certainly does not know.

When talking about understanding, we must stress that pure linguistic understanding; i.e. comprehension, although necessary, is not a sufficient condition for the interpreters to be able to re-express ideas efficiently in another language. Interpreters must be able to grasp the meaning in a less than a second, and must therefore listen constantly in an active, attentive way. This active, attentive listening has to be learned and acquired by the interpreters.

Moreover, depending on the context, on the speaker's tone of voice and many other things, the interpreters may conclude that a certain idea is crucial or unimportant (Jones, 2002, p.14).

Stage Two: *Analysis*

1- Analysis of Speech Types

The interpreter must be aware of the kind of speech being dealt with. Speeches may be of many different kinds. For example, if it is a logical argument then he has to know what a pro is and what is a con, and spot the turning points between them through links, such as but, however, on the other hand, etc. If it is a narration he has to follow chronological sequence and give due attention to dates and verb tenses, if is descriptive he has to decide what is the most important information that should be remembered and noted, and if it is totally rhetorical he has to be aware that the content details maybe irrelevant as the focus in this type of speech is mainly on style.

However, it should be noted that most speeches are hybrid and share characteristics from two or more speech types. In this context, it is worth mentioning to say that the interpreter must make no substantive addition to a speech

2- ***Identification of Main Ideas***

In order to be able to interpret the speaker's idea, an interpreter must know first all what is important in the speaker's comments and what is secondary. In fact, secondary should not be misunderstood as meaning unimportant to the extent that such ideas need not be interpreted. In other words, it can be said that the 'main idea' implies a hierarchy of relative importance of

ideas. One or more ideas may be central to a proposition, whereas others may be 'secondary', but this does not mean that they are unimportant to the point where they do not need to be interpreted. They are 'secondary' but nonetheless they may in turn be more important than a third category, such as mere illustrations. However, a consecutive interpreter is entitled to abridge, but should need some element of illustration of what is essential and what is not; i.e. he should focus on main ideas rather than minute irrelevant details. Therefore, the interpreter, when analyzing a speech, must identify the main ideas. In addition, the interpreter has to reflect the tenor, the spirit, the underlying significance of a speaker's comment, as well as, the literal sense. This can only be done if the ideas are given their relative importance in the interpretation.

3- ***Analysis of Links***

The first key to understanding a speech is the identification of the main ideas; the second is the analysis of the links between those ideas. There are four basic types of links**:** logical consequence (e.g. consequently, as a result), logical cause (e.g. as, since, or due to), sequential ideas (e.g. ideas linked with little word and), and opposition (however, but). However, it should be noted that the interpreter should not fall into the trap of creating links artificially or creating a link where there is none in the original as this is considered a serious mistake. Nor should the interpreter abuse the word 'and'. A series of sentences strung by and…and…and…is a poor style. Key words or links like 'because' and 'therefore', should not be omitted. In short it can be said that in the analysis the interpreter should concentrate on two key elements: the main ideas and the links between them.

4- ***Memory***

During consecutive interpreting, the interpreter listens to a speech and then reproduces it in a different language. This means that the interpreter must be capable of recalling ideas. Some believe that if the interpreter takes notes adequately during the speech he should not need to depend upon memory. This is untrue as it is impossible for the interpreter to rely solely on good notes. The consecutive interpreter must train himself to make use of **'**short term memory' to retain what has been just said and he should make use of 'long term memory' to put the information into context (Phelan,2001,pp.4-5). In addition, the interpreter must order ideas in his brain so as to be able to recall them in a significant way. By focusing on the main ideas and links between these ideas, the interpreter will automatically be thinking of the speech in terms of its structure and this makes the speech easier to recall. In short, from a "telegrammatic" recollection of the basic structure of the speech the interpreter is able to get out the information so as to provide a complete version of the original. The most important part of 'memory' is the ordering of ideas with a view to their recalling.

Stage Three: Re-expression

Having accomplished the processes of understanding and analyzing, the consecutive interpreters must start now to re-express or reproduce the speech they have heard. The interpreters' role here is not to give an academically 'perfect' translation but to make sure that the speaker is understood by the audience. Interpreters must recognize, as well, that they are required to play the role of public speakers; i.e. they must establish eye contact with audience and speak up clearly. The importance of eye contact has to be stressed particularly that the consecutive interpreters will be working with the help of notes most of the time. They should avoid falling into the trap of looking at their notes all the time, either because they are deciphering vague signs

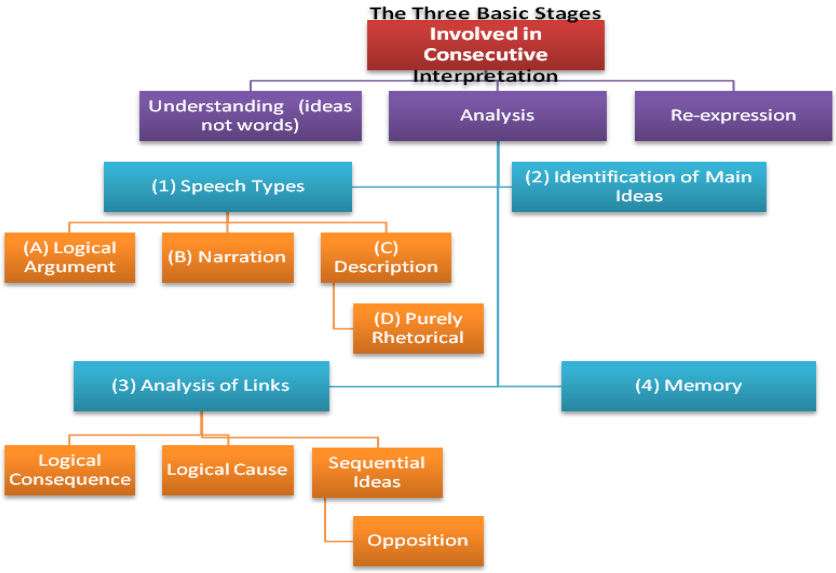
taken unclearly or they are thinking hard at the meaning of the notes. On the contrary, they should just glance down at their notes from time to time.

In addition, the consecutive interpreters are called upon to deliver the speech efficiently. They have to begin speaking practically as soon as the speaker has made it clear that he has finished. They should avoid speaking at a great speed; i.e. they should speak at a sustained, steady pace, without hesitation or unnecessary repetition. They need, as well, to be quite clear for the audience. They should be aware of the crucial role that their voices have in the process of interpreting as "a pleasant voice is an asset in an interpreter … [and he] should not sound boring or bored (Phelan, 2001, p.7).

In general, the overall meaning of a speech may be brought out not just through the words used but also through the speaker's intonation and use of pauses. Thus, it is important for interpreters to pay attention to these things. In other words, just as sentences are separated by full stops on the written page, so sentences should be separated by the right use of voice in interpretation. In many languages this means dropping one's voice at the end of a sentence and then making a short pause. Then again, as paragraphs can be indicated by indents in writing, a new paragraph or section of speech may be indicated by a rather longer pause on the part of the interpreter. However, it should be noted that some interpreters ignore such obvious techniques and consequently their technically correct interpretations lose much as they are presented in a monotonous way.

Moreover, in rendering their interpretation, the interpreters have to be accurate and faithful to the speakers. They must be aware that literal word-for-word translation is not only undesirable, but it is often impossible. Figure (1) sums up the basic stages and principles involved in consecutive interpreting.

Figure 1. ***Basic stages and principles in consecutive interpreting.***



Note-Taking Process in Consecutive Interpreting

Note-taking is central to consecutive interpreting. However, it should be noted that if the essential components of the consecutive interpreter's work; i.e. understanding, analyzing, and re-expressing, are not done correctly and adequately, then the best notes in the world will not make anyone a good interpreter. Notes are just an an aid to enhance the work done on the basis of these three key components. In other words, notes taken "… should not be viewed as an end in themselves, but as means to an end" (Jones, 2002, p.39). They must be regarded as an aid to memory and not as a substitute for it.

The interpreter who focuses too much on his notes does not have the chance to pay the due attention to genuine understanding and analysis while listening to the speech. Thus, he makes serious errors and fails in rendering "…a coherent whole but rather a series of sentences that are reproduced automatically (Jones, 2002, p. 39).

Purpose of Note-Taking

The first and most obvious use of notes is to relieve memory**.** A speech may contain numbers, names, and lists etc., so if the interpreter devotes his intellectual energy to remembering them, this may distract him from the key task of listening attentively to what comes next. In other words, the interpreter needs not to burden his memory with such information; he can continue to focus on listening actively to the rest of the speech.

Notes should reflect the form of speech, making it clear to the interpreter what is important and what is unimportant, what is basic and what is secondary, how ideas are related or separated from one another (Jones, 2002, p. 40).

Practical Points for Note-Taking

Interpreters must be able to take their notes as quickly as possible and write upon something convenient to hold and easy to handle. We would recommend a stenographer's note-pad; roughly 15 cm by 20 cm. Loose sheets of paper should definitely be avoided, as they may become disordered. For any given speech, the interpreter should write on only the recto side of successive pages of the note-pad. It is too awkward to write on both sides; i.e. recto-verso, while taking notes, and if he does there is the risk that he might lose sight of the order in which the notes were taken. It is easier just to keep flipping the pages over always in the same direction. In the meantime, the interpreter should write with something reliable that flows quickly across the page; the best thing is probably still the good old-fashioned lead pencil.

The interpreter should be legible because he needs, as mentioned previously, to communicate through appropriate body language and eye contact with the audience or delegates. Therefore, the interpreter cannot afford to have notes that he has to decipher as he goes along. The meaning that the interpreter wishes to express should leap up at him from the page. This means that the interpreter should write in large characters. Furthermore, notes should be well spread out over the page so that the various elements can be clearly differentiated.

Difficulties Encountered in Note-Taking

Based on the researcher's long experience in consecutive interpreting for more than 30 years, the difficulties encountered in note-taking can be summed as follows:

a. Timing of note-taking.
b. Unit of input.
c. Overall comprehension.

d. Fragmentation of memory span.
e. Mental space for meaning processing.

What to Note?

There is no doubt that the things to be noted are quite logically related to the analysis of the delivered speech. The first thing to be noted should be the main ideas that provide an outline of the speech. This, in fact, enables the interpreters "... to find in their notes the sequence of ideas constituting the speech. This [in turn] should help the interpreter reproduce the speech without faltering, moving swiftly from one idea to the next" (Jones, 2002, p. 41).

Similar to speech analysis, where one has to identify the links (e.g. therefore, since, etc.) and separation between ideas, these links and separations should appear in the notes.
This means that the interpreter's notes should give at least the main ideas of a speech with the links between those ideas. In addition, points of view, tenses of verbs, and modal verbs should also be noted. In order not to overburden memory, the interpreter should note numbers, dates, names and lists. However, it should be mentioned that the main thing that must be avoided, is trying to note everything down as an end in itself which may impede the interpreter's active listening to the original.

Note-Taking Tools

Links: Links should be noted systematically and this should be done accurately, quickly and efficiently. It is best to have some very short forms for all links. These short forms do not have to be symbols nor even abbreviations. There are a number of very short linking words in English which can be used. For example the word 'as' can be used for anything in the 'because' family; the word 'but' for all words and phrases of that family, including 'however' and 'on the other hand'; and the word 'so' for anything in the 'therefore' family. Alternatively, interpreters may use mathematical signs.

Tenses: The tenses that are most important to note are the present, the past and the future and. It is barely useful to differentiate in notes between different past tenses. Usually suffixes are used to indicate these three tenses. For example, the past tense and the past perfect tense can be indicated by adding the suffix (*-ed*) , the suffix (*-ll*) for the future and the suffix (*-ng*) for progressive tense. This symbolic way enables the interpreter to immediately recognize the tense when reading back his notes.

Stress: Usually speakers tend to stress or emphasis particular points in their speech. In order to be able to render all shades of meaning, it is a good thing for the interpreter to note such emphasis. This can be done very simply through a system of underlining. For example, if something is said to be 'important' this can be indicated by using a single underlining, if it is said to be 'extremely important' this can be indicated by using double underlining, and if it is said to be 'fairly important' this can be indicated by using a squiggly line. In general, underlining tells us that something is important or serious.

Suffixes: As mentioned earlier, suffixes can be used to indicate tenses. Also they can be used for the comparatives and superlatives, such as (*-er*) or (*-st*). Similarly, suffixes can

be used to identify different parts of speech, such as verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs (e.g. 'produces', 'production', productive', etc,).

Parentheses [ ]: Sometimes interpreters are aware of what the speaker has said and have fully registered it intellectually but do not have the time to note it down. They can indicate the existence of the point, which they did not note, by including a parenthesis in their notes.

Numbering: It almost goes without saying that interpreters can often make life easier for themselves by numbering points in their notes. However, if the speakers number in their actual speech, they should definitely follow their numbering. In such numbering, whether it comes directly from the speaker or whether it is the interpreters' initiative, there may be not just points but also sub-points, and even sub-sub-points. In such cases, interpreters must take care to have a strict numbering system. If the main points are numbered with Arabic numerals, then sub –points must be noted by something else, letters or Roman numerals so as to avoid the risk of being extremely confused and confusing.

Abbreviations and symbols: The obvious advantage of abbreviations and symbols is that they help save time in taking notes, thus adding to the efficiency of note-taking. Moreover, by reducing an idea, which can be expressed by one word or a number of words, to a symbol, interpreters find it easier to escape the word-for-word translation. The symbol represents an idea, rather than the word or words. However, abbreviations and symbols are very much a personal affair. They are indispensable. Interpreters should be consistent when using abbreviations and symbols, i.e. they should avoid ambiguity by using the same symbol or abbreviation for two different meanings, such as using the abbreviation "diff" for two different words "difficult" and "different". In addition, interpreters should avoid inventing symbols or abbreviations in the course of a speech. In brief, interpreters must draw on the widest possible range of signs.
Interpreters should use:

a. Arrows are, in fact, useful tools in a graphic system of note-taking. Arrows of all possible forms and directions can be used. For example a rising arrow ↑ means increase (quantitatively) and improvement (qualitatively), whereas the falling arrow↓ means the opposite. A horizontal arrow → means lead to etc.
b. Mathematical Signs and Geometrical Shapes such as +, -, =, £, >, < , %,^,~,Δ O and so on.
c. Punctuation Marks such as?**, !, :** etc.
d. Schematic Drawings can be used, such as ☺ (happy, pleased) ,♀(female, woman, lady, girl),♂ (male, man, boy),♥(love, wish, want, desire) etc.
e. Miscellaneous Symbols are as follows: ♯, √, ∞, ≠, ″, &, @ etc.

How to Note?

Notes should reflect the structure of a speech clearly so as to help the interpreters reproduce that structure in their interpretation. Based on the researcher's experience in the field of consecutive interpreting, the following can be considered the most important tips that any interpreter should take into account:

1. Clearly separated and distinct notes are important for ease reading.
2. The beginning of each new idea should be clearly marked.
3. Notes must be taken in a concise and non-literary manner.
4. Taking notes vertically is easier to read than horizontally, because the vertical form offers a natural movement for one's eyes to move from left to right and from top to bottom of a page when reading.
5. A slant or a horizontal line (/) should be drawn after each complete sentence.
6. Clear separation should be made between different paragraphs or sections of a speech. This can be done, for example, by drawing a line across the entire width of the page or by drawing three short, vertical lines (///) in the left-hand margin before a new paragraph or section, to symbolize a paragraph indent.
7. The interpreter should write the things that come most quickly to his pen.
8. The interpreter should not look for equivalences while listening.
9. The interpreter should use the space available to portray hierarchy of ideas and place these relative to one another.
10. The structure of the page should be visible from 3 feet away.
11. The interpreter has to be sure that the color of the pen (pencil) that he uses stands clearly out against the paper.
12. The interpreter should number the pages if they are not bound.
13. The interpreter should cross out each passage in his notes as he completes reading it back.
14. The interpreter should glance at each section of his notes BEFORE speaking and then he should look up at his audience.

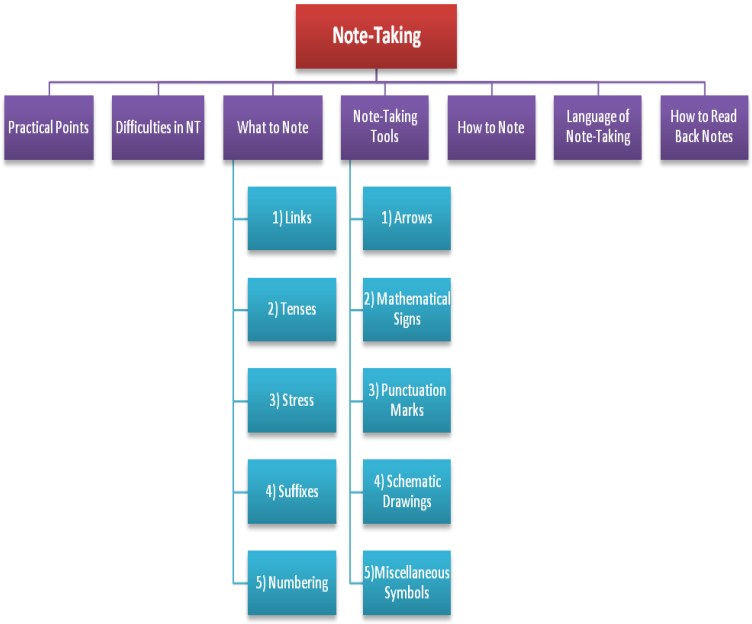
The Language of Note-Taking

Generally speaking, interpreters should not worry so much about the question of using source or target language for notes. However, 'slight preference' (Jones, 2002, p. 61) is given to target language because "…this approach saves time and effort when time comes to deliver the interpretation. This approach also helps the interpreter to make a conscious effort to move away from the structures and expressions of the source language" (Phelan, 2001, p.9). Nevertheless, on the ground both languages, the source and the target, can be combined at will. Interpreters may choose to note things in any way they want, just for reasons of convenience. In addition, the interpreters' notes will contain symbols and abbreviations.

How to Read Back Notes

The interpreters must train themselves and learn the art of glancing down at their notes to remind them of what they are to say next then delivering that part of the text while looking at the audience. The clearer the notes, both in content and layout, the easier this will be. And the clearer the ideas in the interpreters' mind the less is the glancing down at the notes. In figure (2) the whole process and tools of note-taking are summed up.

Figure2. ***Note-Taking Processes and Tools.***



Conclusion

After this extensive review of the effective teaching strategies of consecutive interpretation; i.e. the basic stages and principles, as well as, the note-taking process and techniques; there are some recommendations that should be made.

Firstly, there is a strong need for systematic and in-depth training in note-taking. In other words, this should be assigned in the consecutive interpretation curriculum.

Secondly, due attention should be given to the listening comprehension courses before embarking on the study of consecutive interpretation.

Thirdly, on sight translation course should be a prerequisite for consecutive interpretation teaching and training.

Last to be said and not least, this paper is just the first step towards further studies in this field. In fact, a quantative or qualitative research project can be designed to investigate the effect of multiple independent variables, such as time pressure and complexity of text, on the dependent variables, such as the quality of interpretation.

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