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TRAINING CONSECUTIVE: PRINCIPLES AND APPROACHES

Introduction.

In this article I would like to share my experience in training consecutive interpretation in Translation and Interpreting Department of Herzen University.

The course of consecutive interpretation is an essential part of curriculum of the 5-year programme "Translation/Interpretation and Translation/Interpretation Studies". The candidates for the programme are university students who successfully completed the first year of study.

Course is offered in two sessions per week, for 3-year period. Each session is one and a half hours long. The course involves class contact hours, which are devoted to consecutive interpreting training including memory exercises, voice coaching classes and development of presentational skills. In addition, students are expected to devote time to group practice of consecutive interpreting and other self-directed learning (i.e. background reading; use of information sources e.g. radio, TV, Internet; preparation of glossaries, etc). At the end of each semester the students assemble their portfolios including the records of self-directed learning activities.

Consecutive interpreters, also known as ad hoc interpreters or face-to-face interpreters, carry out interpreting during business and political meetings, negotiations, court hearings and presentations or on site visits. Now consecutive interpreting is considered to be more useful for one-to-one meetings and small groups. What the interpreter does is listen to a section of speech, then interpret what has been said (summarise or relay the gist) and then allow the speaker to continue.

Consecutive interpretation training is the starting point in interpreter training at the university level. There are at least two main reasons to train it.

Consecutive interpreting still needs to be able to perform. Current statistics show that more than 60% of interpretation in Russia is still done in consecutive, at various events involving two languages. In addition it is reasonable to start with consecutive interpretation at the initial stage of interpreter training as during training consecutive interpretation the students learn and consolidate general interpreting techniques that will serve as the basis for simultaneous interpretation as well.

Theoretical concepts to train consecutive

The approach chosen to train interpreter skills at Herzen University is mainly based on theoretical concepts of the Interpretative Model/Theory developed by Prof. Danica Seleskovitch and Prof. Marianne Lederer in their book “Pédagogie Raisonnée de L'interprétation“ (Luxemburg – Paris, 1989).

The Interpretative Model/Theory sees interpretation and translation as a three-step process:

1. merging elements of linguistic meaning with extra-linguistic knowledge to obtain sense;
2. deverbalising that sense as it emerges;
3. expressing this sense linguistically.

As the first and the second steps are inseparable from each other, the students need to be trained 1) to grasp the sense of the message (i. e. to understand the message) and 2) to render the sense into another language.

Thus, it appears that *sense* is a crucial term for interpretation training. Unfortunately this word is used in different meanings and the students should be aware of its specific use related to the area of text linguistics and to interpretation and translation as both of them involve the notion of text or discourse.

As the expression "*the sense of the text*" is often used as the synonym for "*the content of the text*" and both terms "sense" and "content" are important for training interpretation, it is necessary to explain what is implied by them.

Content is defined as the surface structure of the text, i.e. the linguistic meaning of assigned to a particular message on the basis of its linguistic environment (linguistic context). Understanding a content of a message entails identification of the facts, events, etc. which are discussed in a particular message.

Sense is defined as the deep structure of the message. It is the result of the merging process of the linguistic meaning of the message, context and prior knowledge (cognitive context). Thus, the notion of sense incorporates the notions of content and extra-linguistic knowledge.

Consecutive interpretation training process is composed of three main stages:

- Preparatory stage
- Training interpretation without notes
- Training interpretation using notes

Preparatory stage

Before the students are introduced to the techniques of consecutive, they should learn analysing and comprehending what they hear. So the main task of the trainer at this stage is to teach students how to perceive and analyse a message.

Listening for sense is something that can be learned first. The would-be-interpreter should learn to disregard the words he hears in order to focus on the message of the text rather than on the meaning of the word.

In addition the students are aimed at developing gradually the skill to concentrate solely on the sense assigned to the message by the speaker, trying to pick up on every nuance and subtlety. One of the exercises offered to the students on this stage could be listening to a story or newspaper article on some current event and giving back the main points in a coherent way. The students are not asked to translate from memory but rather to tell the story in their native language and to keep it as simple as possible. They are asked to listen to speeches, passage by passage, and then to give a summary.

One of the problems that perplex students is the presence of unknown words in the speeches. This problem disables them to deal with other problems they face in

consecutive interpretation. Bearing this in mind, the trainer may choose texts that may help students to deal with unknown words. The students have to be trained to guess the meaning of the unknown word by using contextual clues if the word is directly related to the sense of this text and its omission may cause problems in interpretation. If the word is not crucial for understanding the message, it may be ignored.

There are some important tools the students should be equipped with on the initial stage of training:

1. *Visualisation*. The students learn to picture events as they are being described in the text. It helps them to focus less on words and render the sense of the message on the basis of what they visualise.
2. *Sequential analysis of the message*. The teacher offers to students to listen to the text which could be broken down into some sequences. The students are asked to prioritise information according to one specific criterion.
3. *Listening to figures and "understanding" them*. Later on the students will note them down but on the early stage of training they should learn how to deal with them not focusing much attention on those which are of less importance for the sense of the message or in case of their significance how they could be incorporated into the target message.
4. *Identifying and ranking the ideas that constitute the message*. The students should learn to extract ideas from the speeches containing lots of various information and data, understand their relative value and links to each other.
5. *Activating passive memories*. The trainer offers the longer speeches containing implicit information and references to the previous passages of the same text. Helping the students to extract the sense the trainer guides them by probing questions which reactivate their latent memories. The students learn to refer to earlier content and take it into consideration while expressing the idea of the whole message and not merely an idea of a passage taken separately.

6. *Provoking some emotional reaction.* Each message contains emotional information and the students should learn to provoke the same emotional reaction on the listener.

Training consecutive interpretation without notes

At this stage the students are introduced to interpretation exercises proper but it is not allowed to do note-taking. The students are not yet expected to give a perfect interpretation, but their rendition should sound normal, without interference from source language. Thus some attention should be paid to the target language expressions. To deal with it various techniques and strategies may be applied by the trainer. I will mention here only some of them. Their choice largely depends on students' errors in the course of consecutive training.

The main trainee's drawback is searching for the right word in the target language, which is often a waste of time and makes them to forget the beginning of the sentence.

The most difficult for students to achieve is not memorising the words of the source text. It happens because actually no students learn their foreign languages in a natural linguistic environment and they still believe that to interpret (or to translate) all you have to do is to substitute one word for another. The temptation to use corresponding terms often leads to borrowing expressions and structures from the source language (calque).

It is appropriate and important at this stage to focus on accuracy of the interpretation and introduce the exercises to develop it, for instance, the students take the role of customers of interpretation and comment on each other's interpreting.

Training consecutive interpretation using notes

Now consecutive interpretation is mainly used in meetings where utterances of the participants to be interpreted are rather brief. Still the speeches can be 5 or even more minutes long and it is impossible to reproduce them without note-taking. The trainer needs to explain the purpose of notes and provide the students with some guiding principles of note-taking. The students should learn how much to note and

why notes are unsystematic, what to note down (figures, abbreviations, first and last statements) symbols to be used, language used in note-taking (target language), positioning the notes on the page, how to use notes when interpreting, etc.

It is crucial to develop the skills of using notes and still concentrating on the sense of the message as note-taking system can not substitute for listening for sense.

When the students will be able to take notes properly, the trainer depending on students' progress could establish next goals in training consecutive interpretation.

In conclusion, it should be noted that training time is the time to introduce students to the real-life process of interpretation. They should be made aware of the fact that there are many factors which may act as constraints on the process. Their role is to make certain decisions in order to maneuver among those factors.