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European Models and Chinese-English Realities

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Article abstract

La théorie européenne de la traduction et de l'interprétation, nettement influencée par l'École de Paris, affirme l'universalité de certains principes comme le découpage du texte en unités de traduction et la traduisibilité de tout énoncé au-delà des langues et des cultures. Or, le cloisonnement entre les civilisations occidentale et orientale, les spécificités morphologiques et structurales des langues d'Orient et la non-homogénéité de leurs standards incitent à une remise en question de ces principes avec pour conséquence qu'il faut, dans la formation des interprètes, insister davantage sur l'acquisition des connaissances culturelles et la maîtrise des modèles de discours.

IS NON-INTRA-IE INTERPRETATION DIFFERENT? European Models and Chinese-English Realities

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Résumé

La théorie européenne de la traduction et de l'interprétation, nettement influencée par l'École de Paris, affirme l'universalité de certains principes comme le découpage du texte en unités de traduction et la traduisibilité de tout énoncé au-delà des langues et des cultures. Or, le cloisonnement entre les civilisations occidentale et orientale, les spécificités morphologiques et structurales des langues d'Orient et la non-homogénéité de leurs standards incitent à une remise en question de ces principes avec pour conséquence qu'il faut, dans la formation des interprètes, insister davantage sur l'acquisition des connaissances culturelles et la maîtrise des modèles de discours.

In the last few years increasing attention in the field of T&I theory has been focused on situations and languages involving one or more non-European, or non-Indo-European (IE) languages and cultures. Some of this work, particularly originating in the regions concerned, suggests real differences with respect to intra-E or intra-IE situations, while studies originating in Europe generally seek to stress the universality of certain fundamental principles, postulating their general applicability subject to appropriate fine tuning.

Reactions to these claims have recently grown more articulate and specific, especially from the Japanese sphere, where several authors have reaffirmed the relevance of linguistic and cultural factors (Gile, Kondo, Hara, Katagiri, Kondo, Philippi, Wakabayashi, Ng / Obana and others).

Since virtually nothing relating to Chinese has been published in international specialised journals, this paper attempts to identify universals, and point out some real differences (with respect to the IE and European experience), in the practice of interpretation on one cross-cultural, non-intra-I-E market. The study is based on a preliminary review of our experience in two years of intensive curriculum design, classwork and professional practice (including recruitment and consultancy to users) at the Graduate Institute of Translation and Interpretation Studies (GITIS) (Fu Jen University) on Taiwan, which specialises in training conference interpreters and translators with Chinese (Mandarin). It is hoped that this overview will stimulate future research.

The interpretation research community is sharply divided (Moser, Gile 1990), but the general theory with which most professionals identify is probably that developed by the Paris school (especially D. Seleskovitch, M. Lederer and the ESIT) which sees interpretation as a process centred on the interpreter him / herself, and traditionally stresses the following points:

(1) that effective interpretation is not, as might appear, a two-step process of high-speed code-switching from SL to TL (using a huge mental dictionary, as it were), but a three-step operation in which the sense of the discourse is first comprehended (interpreted,

with the interpreter in the role of active listener), then re-expressed spontaneously in the target language (the interpreter's native tongue).

(2) that discourse consists of more or less 'fusible' components: only a few nuggets (*e.g.* proper names, numbers and technical terms) are 'translatable', *i.e.* amenable to 'conventional' translation into formal equivalents and thus may survive the process as identifiable language units, but are not representative of it. In speech (*parole*), words and phrases are no longer polysemic and virtual as they are in the dictionary (*langue*) but take on a unique significance in (are disambiguated by) the context of the time, place, speaker, co-text etc.

This thesis has been attacked from several quarters on different grounds:

(1) *It's obvious*: to a practising interpreter it might seem so, but this criticism is unfair insofar as this was pioneering work and was thus traditionally didactic, *i.e.* aimed at students and non-interpreters, and driven by the need to establish the credentials of T&I as a field of human communication beyond the reach of contrastive linguistics, and, more recently, the ambitions of machine translation.

(2) *It leads to unjustified liberties being taken by the interpreter* (from literalists, generally not themselves interpreters)

(3) *It is subjective: and unscientific*: far more experimental and observational research is needed (Gile 1990); investigators should not be deterred by the number and complexity of factors involved.

The Paris school has produced a fairly large volume of writings and, as the most convincing unified body of work on interpretation (specifically conference interpretation), has also been the most influential. That the strongest research effort should originate in Europe is, of course, no accident, since for various historical reasons, this is where conference interpretation developed, and the conclusions of these writers and trainers, based on a vast corpus of collective experience, applies convincingly to much of European professional conference interpretation activity, especially to the more mature and professional sector of the market.

Classwork at the GITIS regularly generates examples which confirm basic themes of ESIT teaching, but also sometimes draw attention to significant linguistic or cultural specificities.

Example (1)

Context: television interview with ROC Foreign Affairs Minister Chien Fu (February 1992). After stating that industrialised countries should help developing countries, (partly to sustain markets for their own goods) the Minister outlines two further goals of foreign policy:

第一方面，就是能夠幫助我們確實掌握我們經濟發展所需要的資源，因為臺灣地區資源貧乏，我們未來的經濟發展一定要有資源來支持我們的發展。

"Di yi fang mian jiu shi nenggou bangzhu women queshi zhangwo
first aspect is be able help us really *zhangwo*
women jingji fazhan suo xuyao de ziyuan + yinwei Taiwan diqu ziyuan
[the] (wch-our-econ.devt-needs) resources because Taiwan area resources
pinfa + women weilaide jingji fazhan yiding yao you ziyuan lai zhichi
scarce our future econ. devt. definitely need have resources to support
women de fazhan..."
our development...

Out of context, the meaning of this segment: "because on Taiwan, resources are scarce ... we need to *control*? assure?** the resources we need for our future development" is unclear. If we were told the sentence was taken from a speech by the Interior Minister, or an official responsible for land procurement, we would certainly give it a different interpretation; in other words, it cannot be translated without a knowledge of who is speaking and what he has said previously. Resorting on the dictionary *instead* of this information is no help — *zhangwo*: "grasp, master, know well; take in hand; control" — or, worse, may be a recipe for disaster ("Minister says aim of foreign policy is to *control* certain countries' resources..."). Attentive and thoughtful listening and clear 'semantic' note-taking would yield the sense of 'guarantee our access to, ensure that we have access to'.

Such examples, numerous in the ESIT literature, demonstrate the irrelevance of postulating the word, sentence or text as 'unit of translation': in *speech*, words have only one, or none of the meanings given in a dictionary, while 'sentence' and 'text' are loosely defined (see below, syntax); accurate interpretation (and therefore translation) depends to a great extent on context, and extralinguistic and extratextual knowledge.

This principle surely applies equally to interpretation from Chinese as from French, English, German, and no doubt other languages, much as factors like acoustics and visibility.

This paper will not take issue with the 'interpretive' theory on any of the grounds stated above. However, a theory may be provisionally satisfying, persuasive and constructive, but incomplete. Apart from those who are dissatisfied with the perceived 'naively empirical' nature of the theory, there are others, notably outside Europe, who feel that the problems described in the ESIT corpus do not adequately match those encountered in their own practice, either in connection with the role of the interpreter or the nature of the event — even within the definition of *conference* interpretation — or because certain real cultural and linguistic factors are not sufficiently adressed, or worse, swept aside by (largely culturally and linguistically uninformed) dogma in support of the theory's universality.

In world terms, the *corpus* is incomplete as a basis for a universal theory. European writings are based on a body of experience consisting almost entirely of instances of communication between speakers of European languages, (and although speaking at events worldwide) mostly with European cultural backgrounds or within European communication paradigms. But however universal the workings of a competent interpreter's brain might be in processing information, local conditions *at both ends* of the process significantly alter the overall picture: on the input side, there are significant differences in the nature of discourse; in some 'extra-IE' interpreting situations, certainly involving Chinese, probably Japanese (and, perhaps, other language/cultures) cultural, social and even linguistic factors are of an order such that they cannot be as easily dismissed as in the intra-IE sphere; on the output side, a doctrine of training and practice which relies entirely on the interpreter's ability to 'spontaneously reformulate' (the 'SL' processed/interpreted message in the 'TL') is marred by the fact that, again for historical reasons (Setton 1990) most non-IE interpreters have to work into a B language.

One visible motivation of ESIT writings is to reject the claim that some languages are 'more difficult' as an excuse for poor interpretation. Choi (1990: 114), adressing users and non-professionals, uses illustrations from Korean-French to restate this position and reject any influence of language-specific factors, stressing the importance of a sufficient command of the language and the necessary extralinguistic knowledge.

In this author's experience, those who maintain that pair-specific difficulties exist are not confined to users and students, but include many professionals. However, these sticking-points are not confined to language which, as most of us would probably agree, is only one dimension of interpretation.

The problem areas reviewed below relate principally to Chinese, though some aspects may parallel other non-intra-IE situations.

As a contribution to the debate on universality versus differentiation as between intra-IE and non-intra-IE language combinations, this paper will cover a range of factors both **internal** to the Chinese language and Chinese culture as reflected in it, and **external**, *i.e.* historically and socially-defined influences on discourse and communication, the contours of the present market for Chinese, and — last but not least — the profile, tasks and role the interpreters themselves, on the hypothesis that these factors affect the weighting of different variables in the interpretation process. Some implications for training, and suggested areas for research, are offered in conclusion.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

The dogma which has evolved around the Paris school, that the languages involved in interpretation and translation are irrelevant to the process, is sometimes abbreviated to the assertion that 'no language is more difficult than any other". In this form, it obscures certain important distinctions of relevance to the profession as a whole:

(1) are any languages easier or harder to *acquire*? (with implications for the potential growth of the available interpreter population in certain combinations); do all languages present the same cognitive challenge to adult learners?

(2) do any languages present specific comprehension problems (to both natives and non-natives) arising from their degree of internal homogeneity, standardisation, or other morphological factors? what mastery of variations (accents, dialects) can we expect of interpreters? (possible implications for the definition of the 'working language').

A more glaring limitation of this dogma as seen from a non-European perspective is its scant attention to the cultural gap, suggesting (contrary to what is said elsewhere) that interpreters interpret between *languages* rather than between *cultures*. It is significant that many interpreters with Chinese, *whether A or B*, almost prefer working *into* rather than *from* Chinese, *whatever the type of discourse*. Since this is true of several confirmed and respected professionals (Liu: 6) it is not helpful to dismiss this as being due to the interpreter's 'insufficient command of the language'. This leads us to reexamine a controversial issue, in the light of Chinese-English and other non-intra-IE evidence: does any *combination* or *pair* of languages as SL/TL present special or characteristic difficulties, either linguistic or due to a cultural gap?

Language acquisition

In the area of adult language acquisition, Piaget and Chomsky seem to agree that only secondary features of a language can be acquired after adolescence, but interpreters recognise that this still allows acquisition of a B good enough for consecutive, and only forbids learning to A level after adolescence.

History and geography are no doubt responsible in large part for the present imbalance in language combinations (Setton 1990) which places the added burdens of working into an acquired language, and frequent relay interpretation, on non-IE mother tongue interpreters.

But linguistic factors also contribute. Gile (1988) has described mainly lexical features limiting the potential for acquisition of Japanese to C level (complete oral comprehension) for a native-speaker of an IE language. In Chinese, the main obstacle to acquisition by IE-speakers is no doubt, initially, the tonal dimension. Secondly, the complex writing system delays achieving reading fluency adequate for sight translation and the use of text to support simultaneous interpretation. Finally, the concentration of semantic substance (presumably no poorer than IE) into a far smaller stock of morphemes (than in IE) results in very high homophone frequency (as in Japanese), making context far more significant as a disambiguator, at the phonetic level, than in IE languages.

Conversely, seen from the Chinese or Japanese perspective, IE languages have their own 'alien' dimensions, notably the complex apparatus of tenses, case and number, and (in English, but not French) the high semantic charge in stress and intonation relative to the intramorphemic information.

Culture-bound features such as honorifics and deictic 'territory' or 'rank' codes (Japanese, Korean) might be an obstacle separating A-ness from B-ness (and C-ness from B-ness) by too great a distance.

In theory, these challenges (homophones, cultural codes) are not insuperable, at least to C level; co-text and context are equally available as disambiguators to foreign and native listeners, and even a very high density of cultural referents can be mastered through painstaking conventional study and long sojourns in the cultural environment.

In practice, however, contact has been, and remains, limited: social and geographical problems (world distribution and location of speakers, limited socio-economic interpenetration, travel restrictions, media bias) still skew possibilities of access: English language and American culture are accessible from any point on the globe, while other languages are localised and require the assimilation of a greater volume of cultural information, necessitating far longer sojourns with all the attendant financial and social difficulties. As a result, very few real or functional bilinguals (or even proficient listeners) have emerged.

Language homogeneity and norms

It seems absurd to suggest that any language could be *intrinsically* (regardless of A-, B- or C-ness) 'more difficult' than another to understand or speak in the normal way. But in saying this, we assume that 'the language' spoken by the speakers is the same as that of the listeners. This is by no means everywhere as self-evident as it is in European societies, due to different stages reached in standardisation:

> "Perhaps the most unusual feature of Modern Standard Chinese (MSC) [...] is that it does not exist at present as a common tangible fact in the same way that, say, Modern Standard English does in the English-speaking world." (Kratochvil 1990: 145)

Non-homogeneity may involve 'vertical' and/or 'horizontal' variations; in other words, caste and dialect.

In the first case, stratified formal or conventional languages are a major factor in some cultures:

> "the birth of MSC as a standard coincides with the birth of Modern China [in 1949] [...] Its immediate predecessor, Mandarin, [...] was a specific application of educated Peking dialect to the sole purpose of communication among imperial officials, who were a tiny fraction of the population"

In Japanese, hierarchical language is pervasive; Ng and Obana (1991) conclude from a study that their Japanese-B and C students specifically need more exposure to *formal* Japanese; according to other writers, even Japanese native speakers who spend time overseas lose their A-like familiarity with such nuances (Hara 1988).

'Horizontally', accent and dialect are far greater hazards in interpretation from Chinese than from European languages:

> "The majority of the present core of [...] political leaders are not speakers of Peking dialect, and they have developed a sort of [...] 'cadre language', which [...] bears the traces of several dialects through the areas of which the revolution moved toward Peking" (Kratochvil 1968: 135,146).

Moreover, PRC delegations generally include members from various provinces whose 'accents' often cross the line into dialect — more so than Swiss, Austrian or Scottish delegates, since Chinese "is still much further away from the normative stage than any of the major Western standard languages" (*ibid.*). Neither Chiang Kai-shek nor Mao Tse-tung spoke MSC. Taiwan leaders also come from various different regions of China. One former official, Yu Guohua, claimed to speak MSC but was hard to understand by most television viewers without subtitles.

The problem of affiliation (language or dialect) in Chinese is controversial (Kratochvil 1968: 13 ff.), so that there is no consensus on whether these national figures spoke a different *language* (entitled to figure in an interpreter's language combination) or a *dialect*, which any interpreter with 'Chinese' in his combination would thus be expected to understand, while most native speakers of 'Chinese' did not. Currently, even the treatment of recognised autonomous (mutually incomprehensible) 'dialects' such as Cantonese or Hokkienese in terms of AIIC language combinations is inconsistent. Research will be needed to interpret the Chinese situation in terms of interpretation needs and refine the existing norms.

NON-INTRA-IE INTERPRETATION: ACROSS LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

Whether or not Chinese or Japanese are more difficult to learn in adulthood, or to understand fully once 'learned', the contention that no *combination* or *pair* of languages as SL/TL presents special or characteristic difficulties might be harder to defend, especially if we substitute 'language/cultures' for 'languages'. We have to examine whether interpreting *between*, for instance, Chinese or Japanese and English or French involves any special problems as opposed to 'intra-IE' interpreting.

According to Seleskovitch (1968: 87),

> "everything that is said in one language can be expressed in another, provided that the two languages belong to societies which *have attained* comparable levels of development" (my italics): and again "words are only untranslatable when their cultural referent does not *yet* exist in the society using the target language." (my italics)

This does not address the case of cultures which have evolved to a comparable degree of complexity, but along different paths. Chinese and European stocks of cultural referents, which form the backdrop of all thought and discourse, evolved separately over centuries from entirely different cosmogonies, generating parallel worlds of astronomy and mythology, different elemental, animal, plant, number, colour and anatomical symbolisms as well as different histories of art, science, and religion, all of which are alive and well in the Chinese and European languages today. These differences are far from being academic to modern conference interpretation: seminars and conferences on Chinese medecine, acupuncture, comparative religion, etc., are common on the private market.

1. Linguistic factors

Some writers have highlighted linguistic difficulties in translation between 'typologically dissimilar languages' (TDL). Most recent work in this vein deals with written translation (Philippi, Gile 1988a). In interpretation, the evidence which forms the basis of this paper suggests a hypothesis slightly at variance with Paris dogma, *i.e.* that purely linguistic structural or morphological dissymmetries, though 'ideally' neutralised in interpretation, are in real life not *absolutely* irrelevant, or more precisely, that the impact of these features on the difficulty of the task is proportional to the sum of two parameters:

(1) the degree of constraints such as linearity (greater in simultaneous than in consecutive interpretation) and (2) the density of certain formal or 'written' features (lexical or structural) in the incoming discourse.

(a) *semantic 'marking'*

It has long been recognised by most authors that the bare words of the source discourse do not suffice for translation. Darbelnet describes 'compensatory procedures', and other sources have been listed, from co-text and context to extralinguistic 'cognitive complements' (Lederer) and, in interpretation, a visual perception of the speaker.

The interpreter inevitably makes parts of discourse more or less explicit (committing himself to his *interpretation* to that extent) to fit TL grammatical and logical conventions and expectations. Chinese (like some related languages) has far fewer 'disambiguating' markers in certain areas, notably tense, number and gender, so that decisions have to be taken at more basic levels than intra-IE, and in some cases semantic substance has to be 'supplied' (*e.g.* in translating the Japanese '***Matsumoto-san*** ': courtesy requires some title in an IE language, but the original gives no information on gender or marital status).

Example (2) (newspaper editorial):

不久之前，美國總統大選中有人喊出，日本人說美國工人懶惰，就是這批懶惰工人製造出原子彈，並以日本為試爆地的。此語一出，全場掌聲如雷。

Bu jiu zhiqian, Meiguo zongtong daxuan zhong you ren hanchu, Ribenren shuo Meiguo gongren landuo, jiu shi zhexie landuo gongren zhizaochu yuanzidan, bing yi Riben wei shibaodi. Ci yu yi chu, quanchang zhangshengrulei.

"Recently, during the US Presidential election campaign, *there-is / are person / people cry / cried out* (han chu) "Japanese say US workers are lazy, well these lazy workers are the ones who *make / made / are making* the A bomb and *use / used / using* Japan as a test site." This *is / was* immediately greeted by general applause."

An immediate decision on whether the events occurred once or several times, how many people were involved etc, is not too difficult in this case, but (as Choi points out), a good command of English is necessary to immediately supply all the correct markers of time, place, tense, number etc.

However, the choice is not always this clear, as in an example from peace talks in which the interpreter (working from A) prudently rendered the segment

"我 門 應 當　警 惕　有　國 家　干 預 ...."

women yingdang jingti you guojia ganyu...
*we must vigilant there-is country / ies interfere

as "we must be on our guard against interference by countries...", only to be corrected by the delegate who intended to specify 'a country'...

Again, some cases, too heavy a hand may exclude options deliberately left open and equivocal — whether for poetic reasons, as a 'negotiating' convention, or indeed as a fundamental approach to communication (*infra*).

It is worth noting in passing that the Chinese delegates' practice of monitoring the interpretation does not make things any easier, especially since the listener almost always belongs to the 'literalist' school of T&I...

(b) *compactness and abbreviation*

The fact that in the three examples supplied so far, the English words take up more space than the phonetic Chinese, is no accident of transcription: *where words have 'one-to-one' formal equivalents*, the Chinese words are shorter (the added dimension of tones allows for more semantic information per unit, and virtually every single unit (syllable) carries meaning). What is the impact of this in interpretation? Certainly, when we are following (and reformulating) a spontaneous flow of meaning, the length of words is irrelevant. However, technical translators from English to French, among others, will confirm that in the case of compact (written or technical) discourse, the 'swelling factor ('coefficient de prolifération') is significant. If there is a clear morphological *i.e. formal* dissymetry (here in terms of volume), it will constrain the interpreter *proportionally to the formal content, i.e.* the density of incompressible language, including 'frozen', conventional or technical terms, and may become critical in listings of such items as 脫硫加氫廠 *tuoliu jiaqing chang* (5 syllables) 'desulphurisation and hydrogenation plant' (13) or administrative terms such as 農林牧漁 *nonglinmuyu* (4) (*guanyuan*): '(officials responsible for) farming, forestry, animal husbandry and fisheries' (Li, Liu: 6-7, 9).

But in Chinese, these 'knots' are also common in *non-technical* discourse, due to the wide use of the terse four-character form:

(a) *in chengyu* (成語) and other idioms, which are abundantly used for abbreviation and impact, or a literary flavour, and are often heavily charged with cultural referents;

(b) in politics, and especially on the Chinese mainland, highly abbreviated slogans and labels for economic policies, political programs (批林批孔 *pi-Lin-pi-Kong*, "Campaign to Criticise Lin Biao and Confucius") etc. are regularly coined and sometimes find their way into international conferences. A notorious recent one was "五講四美", literally "(the) "five 'attentive-to's, four beautifuls", referring to a 1988 campaign for "attention to civilised behaviour, courtesy, hygiene, order and civic duty, and a healthy spirit, polite speech, correct attire, good behaviour and a pleasant environment", which occurred in speeches at the World Health Organisation; an example of how the 'culture gap' can include contemporary differences between political systems.

According to Seleskovitch (1968: 89)

> "when [the interpreter] is in (this) situation [word untranslatable because cultural referent does not exist in the TL] ...it is first developed through explanation..."

The challenge of doing this in simultaneous interpretation of fast, concentrated discourse referring to the concept of heat in Chinese medicine, or listing abbreviated names for abstruse Maoist political movements, can be left to the reader's imagination. Not surprisingly, the issue of footnotes — how many and how full — dominates much of the debate on Chinese-IE translation.

(c) *sinicisation of foreign proper nouns*

Another purely morphological problem, but none the less real, arises from the systematic sinicization of foreign proper nouns. Phonetically sinicised names are often difficult to recognize and reconstitute (*Ke'er* for Kohl, *Fuluoxiluofu* for *Voroshilov*, *Makesi* for Marcos... or Marx!). This phenomenon is likely to occur between languages of different origins, even when they share the same writing system (Persian, Arabic and Urdu), but a technical problem of another order arises when that system *represents concepts independently of pronunciation.*

The Chinese maintain their own pronunciation of proper names used in various languages and cultures throughout South-east Asia and the Far East, including some used in societies which no longer use or have never used Chinese characters (Indo-China). In some cases, the two versions are etymologically cognate and can be inferred or recognised (*e.g. Wanhsiang* for Vientiane, *Jin Ri-cheng* for Kim Il-sung).

But in the case of Japanese personal names, places, historical eras, companies and trade-names — adding up to a body of vocabulary which is hardly escapable in any language, given Japan's role in world affairs — the pronunciation is completely different. Thus the Chinese know as '*Fengtian*', '*Guangdao*' and '*Gongze*' the entities known — not only to the Japanese, but to the world — as Toyota, Hiroshima, and Miyazawa. This problem is a major irritant, as it affects not only Japanese-Chinese interpretation, but all interpretation both into and out of Chinese wherever things Japanese are mentioned. Only massive memorization or a thorough knowledge of the two languages can reduce this hazard to levels due to similar quirks inside the I-E sphere (*e.g. Ratisbonne* for Regensburg, or *Aix-la-Chapelle* for Aachen), since new, small companies, tradenames and personalities are continually coming within the public eye.

d) *syntax*

The word-order aspects of 'typological dissimilarity' have been raised by some writers, mainly in relation to Japanese-English translation (Philippi 1989). In simultaneous interpretation, syntax obviously poses certain technical constraints, which are addressed by anticipation based on language familiarity and background knowledge, and mechanical strategies ('syntacrobatics'); the problem has been thoroughly studied within the Indo-European languages, especially with regard to German (Wilss *et al.*).

Chinese, Japanese and Korean share certain differences from the main IE conference languages in terms of word-order. From a European standpoint the main 'alien' phenomena in Chinese are

1. complex embedding, or 'porte-manteau' constructions;
2. topicalisation (Choi: moving from the general to the particular) and the high frequency of subject-object-verb patterns.

Multiple embedding and long, complex sentences are not features of traditional Chinese, but have been traced back to foreign influence in the 1920s when the Chinese intellectual and literary scene opened its doors to the West (Kubler). So thirsty were some for fresh cultural input after years of isolation that some authors, including Luxun, even encouraged the adoption of English syntax patterns. In addition, "the people who now set the tone in writing and indirectly also in speech in Mainland China were partly brought up on the hasty and truly bad translations of Marxist writings, mainly from Russian" (Kratochvil 1968: 143).

Topicalisation (*thématisation*), on the other hand, is native to Chinese and is shared with many non IE languages in Asia and elsewhere. Chao (1968, quoted in Kubler) has estimated that in traditional Chinese at least, 'the applicability of the subject-predicate relation to sentences is perhaps not higher than 50%' although Kubler claims it is increasing *e.g.* 認識您很高興 *renshi nin hen gaoxing*, literally 'to meet you very glad' is being displaced in poor translation by 我很高興認識您 *wo hen gaoxing renshi nin* 'I (am) very glad to meet you' (although such a short segment would naturally be insignificant in interpretation).

The hybrid and unmanageable result of this multiple marriage, combining long sentences and the native Chinese syntactical features mentioned above, is the bureaucratic jargon or 党八股 *dang bagu* ("party eight-legged essay" — the eight-legged essay was the model for composition in the Mandarinate examinations for a millennium), and its international cousin, "UN *bagu* " of the type:

> *"Zhuxi xiansheng,*
> *Zhongguo daibiaotuan xian jiu xiangmu 79 (b), Lianheguo disige fazhan shinian (1991-2000) guoji fazhan zhanlue, 79 (d) liangshi wenti, 79 (e), xin nengyuan he kezaisheng nengyuan yi ji 79 (f) kaifa fazhanzhong guojia nengyuan deng sige yiti fabiao ruxia kanfa. ..."*
>
> Literal sequence: "Chairman, the Chinese delegation [will] now regarding items 79 (b) "International Development Strategy for the Fourth UN Development Decade (1991-2000)", item 79 (d) "The Food Situation", item 79 (e) "New and Renewable Energy Resources" and item 79 (f) Energy Resource Development in Developing Countries, these four agenda items present(s) the following observations:'

Interpreters and trainers — even students — often welcome the liberating effect of alien syntax, which forces the interpreter to break away from the SL structure and do 'real interpretation', overcoming any reservations he might have about his sovereignty of expression.

Indeed, issues such as the 'unit of translation' dissolve more readily in Chinese: sentence and clause are even less relevant than in English (even in writing: punctuation was imported from the West). Si Guo (in Kubler: 130) states that "English sentences are like a chain made of many interconnecting links; Chinese sentences are more like little rice cakes piled up randomly." For instance, in Example (1) above, it is unclear whether the segment 'because (on) Taiwan resources (are) scarce" belongs to the preceding or the following 'sentence'. Here the sense is not affected, but in some contexts requiring a marked TL commitment to the direction of cause and effect, there can be some hesitancy in choosing an interpretation.

Real problems arise with declaimed written discourse. The ideal solution is to obtain a copy of the text in advance, but as professionals are all too aware, this not always available, or it is not followed by the speaker (Liu: 7) In the absence of a text, strategies for dealing with a delayed rheme or verb in SI include using experience and a knowledge of standard formulas to support anticipation (Zhuang, Wilss). However, experience-based strategies are difficult to share through training. In the absence of a 'clue', such mechanical problems also severely constrain style, leading to a cultural problem to the extent that Western audiences, are used to direct statements and prefer to get the 'operative' part of the message quickly and may be irked by the repeated use of 'as far as,' '...is concerned,' 'regarding...,' and the like.

"Topic before comment" is more than a mere feature of syntax in Chinese and other Far Eastern languages; it reflects traditional conventions in communication (in negotiation — see below — or in the presentation of one's 'contribution') in which the theme, including the territory or topic under discussion, relationship between the speakers etc., is first established and explored before the 'predicate' or 'rheme', *i.e.* decisions and actions, are addressed.

DISCOURSE STRUCTURE

(a) *"Incomplete' logic and 'missing links'*

Various authors have highlighted differences in discourse structure and presentation between Far Eastern and European languages, especially with reference to Japanese (Gile, Katagiri, Ng and Obana, Brown, Hinds; and especially Wakabayashi)). Choi mentions the absence of logical links in Korean as compared to French. Toyama (1988: 8) describes Japanese logic as 'stippled': elements that are understood by participants because of their shared background or cultural knowledge are omitted, resulting in 'gaps in the logical progression'. Some, like Edward T. HALL have gone so far as to suggest that the unusually uniform, insular characteristics of Japanese society and history have evolved a separate collective unconscious within the language community, allowing for only internal comprehension. Some authors cite Japanese traditions of reserve and a distrust of garrulity, indeed of all verbal expression, suggesting that those 'missing links' might not be visible to *any* reader (Kondo 1988: 73).

(b) *patterns of presentation*

While much Chinese discourse is now heavily modelled on modern American public speaking techniques, in more formal speeches we can see more than a few traces of homegrown patterns such as the 八股 文 *baguwen* (see above). Wakabayashi (1990: 416-7) has listed some other traditional discourse patterns, such as the 起承轉 合*qi-cheng-zhuan-he* model, in which the *zhuan* or 'transition' can be disorientating, as it involves unexpected digressions.

CONVENTIONS OF COMMUNICATION — TRANSACTION OR RITUAL?

A basic difference in the communication relationship between East and West has been (humorously?) suggested by Hinds (1987, quoted in Wakabayashi): 'in the West the responsibility for the message getting across is assumed by the writer; in the East it falls to the reader'. (This is one convention which this author does not encourage students to emulate in their role as interpreter-speakers, however little choice we may have as interpreter-listeners).

Encounters and negotiations

The "topic, then comment" pattern is not merely a feature of sentences in Far Eastern cultures, but is also reflected at the level of entire events, as illustrated by Saito (1990)'s report of a Harvard University seminar on negotiating techniques. According to the author (confirmed by interviews with Japanese businessmen) the method was not as universally effective as claimed: it underestimated cultural factors, adopting an adversarial, confrontational model in which both sides take up clear positions from the start, in contrast with the Japanese approach, which is related to the procedure for arranging marriages (*miai*). This begins with the process of *nemawashi*, in which the parties "sound each other out informally"; once face-to-face, they "should choose language carefully, be flexible and adaptive, and never take up a hard and fast position." Such a meeting is "a ritualistic encounter, without which there is no progress in the relationship", and at which one should "never make concrete proposals; never try to persuade the other; never express pros and cons."

EVENTS: THE MARKET FOR INTERPRETATION WITH CHINESE

Consecutive interpretation markets are notoriously difficult to measure or characterise, and Chinese is no exception. The market for Chinese (Mandarin) — English simultaneous and 'large-scale' conference interpretation (other IE languages are rarely if ever interpreted directly from or into Chinese) can be broadly divided into

(1) the UN and International Organisations (PRC delegations)
(2) an emerging private market in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South-East Asia.

General conditions and communication event types differ in various ways between these two sectors, but they have in common a high proportion of declamatory or 'one-way' discourse.

An apprentice should always begin by working on the most natural material: in the case of interpreters, free 'transactional' dialogue, as spontaneous as normal conversation, but enriched with the import of economic and territorial interests. This was the atmosphere in the early days of European interpretation. Most seasoned interpreters find such work more rewarding, since live dialogue, being pragmatic and creative, challenges the interpreter's communication skills and enhances his role, whereas the 'ex cathedra' type of speech merely tests his / her resources of raw knowledge and vocabulary. When a text is supplied in advance, the task approximates to translation; when it is not, the result is often frustrating for both interpreters and users.

In Europe and 'Western democracies', open public debate (*dêbat 'contradictoire'*) has often had a visible link with policy-making and the direction of society; elsewhere in the world, where there is extensive consultation, it is not generally verbal and public, let alone, in most regions, international on the scale of a body like the European Economic Community, which served as midwife to the interpreting profession forty years ago. There is no such matrix in the Far East, no regional organisation where neighbouring countries can practice international discussion and decision-making at different levels. Even where consensus politics has replaced autocracy in the national context, it is often the affair of a small group of men in a smoke-filled room. In the Japanese tradition, when there is contact with parties who are not yet 'family', "the meeting is not a place to make decisions (these are to be made later)." (Saito *ibid.*)

New trends in communication, sometimes unsettling to Europeans, are emerging, such as the 'two-way-mirror' market research sessions, which are common in Japan and major Japanese consumer goods markets in South-East Asia, consumers are invited to tea or dinner and asked to talk about a product, while manufacturers, marketers and / or retailers sit hidden behind a two-way mirror, if necessary with an interpreter.

Apart from such conventions, evidence suggests that the 'safe' or one-way model of meeting predominates in the initial stages of a multilingual conference market, no doubt because organisers are unwilling to entrust real negotiations to an untried profession. The Taiwan-US trade talks, for instance, have traditionally been interpreted by the lawyers representing the two sides. Saito (*ibid.*) found that US negotiators were 'frustrated by the use of interpreters, which they believe further reduces their persuasive effectiveness".

From the training perspective, the higher the proportion of meetings of this type perceived on the market, the more difficult it is to train students to the analytical approach — and even the syntactical agility — needed for the interpretation of truly interactive, spontaneous discussion between cultures. In the ritual speeches of opening sessions, award-giving ceremonies, technical conferences etc, 'culture' — technical, economic or traditional — is deliberately shown off in knowledge and vocabulary, encouraging the notion that it can be acquired in a syllabus. Interactive dialogue reflects another, less codified side, of the cultural encounter, calling for experience, flair, and an effort of interpretation.

Research based on appropriate yardsticks to measure discursive vs. declarative content (such as volume of read and spontaneous discourse, length of Q / A sessions, decisions taken at interpreted meetings, etc.) might provide interesting insights into the nature of markets in different parts of the world.

TASK DEFINITION

(a) *simultaneous into the B language*

Much of the fundamental ESIT doctrine assumes that the interpreter is working into an A (native) language. Thus, the interpreter:

> 'reflects the style of the original'; he can 'switch (however reluctantly) to the US or British listener's wavelength' [...]
> "the job of the interpreter is even more difficult... when the speakers and listeners come from different cultures... have different ways of thinking and different cultural frames of reference... *he accomplishes this because the spontaneity of his native language provides him with the ability to adapt to his listeners*." (Seleskovitch 1968 / 78; my emphasis)

Certainly most professionals and users agree that better results are obtained when interpreters are working into their native languages, (provided they have full command of the SL), but there are regrettably, very few IE natives available with non-IE passive languages. The non-intra-IE interpreter is thus condemned to work into B, which in addition to increasing the workload (Liu: 5) implies the constant frustration of using a reduced 'pallet' to express the incoming richness of his own mother tongue with its high density of culture- and history-laden idioms and expressions. When a particularly flowery, literary or creative speaker takes the floor he cannot, as Europeans can, turn to find an English A to take over. In training, too, students more readily accept an interpreter-trainer's urgings to abandon the 'form' of the SL when they have the haven of an A to settle into in the 'target' language.

(b) *Relay interpretation*

Although the phenomenon of acceptable — sometimes better — performances from A to B for *technical* discourse still applies, speakers of non-IE languages usually have to relay a European language to their colleagues. Good relay interpretation calls for a solid understanding of the subject matter, to enable intelligent editing — notoriously in medical and similar technical conferences, where this is the only hope for the whole team to keep pace with a rapid succession of slides or diagrams.

TRAINING

A living training programme should aim to adapt itself to the available human resources, and to the realities of the market and types of discourse likely to be encountered, while trying to ameliorate language imbalances, and improve access to environments and cultures.

Language proficiency and market requirements

The first major difference between an intra-IE and a non-intra-IE training course is that in the latter, graduates have to be ready to work into B in all modes (simultaneous, consecutive and sight translation).

If the tried-and-tested stepwise approach (consecutive before simultaneous) is adopted, with refinements, the consequence is a large number of steps: 1. discourse studies in one language - 2. consecutive from B to A - 3. consecutive from A to B - 4. simultaneous from B to A - 5. simultaneous A to B (2nd year) — simultaneous with text.

In view of the higher demands on the B language, and the still emerging status of the profession, admission to interpretation at GITIS is very limited (2-5 students per year (with English) out of a total of 150-200 candidates). B-language enhancement is given throughout the course, and interpretation students are required to spend a year abroad before, or sandwiched into training (the latter option allows for the limited travel experience of local applicants in comparison with Europeans). As already stated, qualified trainees with acquired Chinese are extremely rare.

General knowledge is left to the student's responsibility, but courses in computers, economics, law etc. are offered, as well as conference lore, procedure, budgets, and other aids to professional integration.

Culture-specific strategies

The realisation that students do not recognise or sense the 'logic' in IE discourse as spontaneously as European students do, and the differences in discourse presentation, intellectual traditions and the background landscape of cultural referents have prompted curriculum designers at GITIS to preface the course with six to eight weeks of intensive (monolingual) analysis in each of the languages, including gisting, paraphrase and the memory and retention exercises leading up to consecutive interpretation with notes. The aim of this introduction is to familiarise students with a range of speech types, conventions for presenting information, negotiating, polemics, persuasion, etc. including opening gambits, rhetorical techniques etc., in the different language / cultures, to facilitate pattern recognition and thus, anticipation.

The relatively higher incidence of *formal* discourse in Chinese speeches for interpretation on existing markets (both in the international organisations and the local and private sectors) justifies the maintenance of *sight translation*, followed by *simultaneous-with-text*, as separate additional credits in any comprehensive course for conference interpreters with Chinese and an active B language.

This does not of course, justify throwing out the baby with the bathwater, and the art and craft of *consecutive interpretation* forms the core of the program. In view of the structural and presentational differences in English, Chinese, and Japanese, we are trying to revive the bolder, less linear exercises apparently formerly practiced at ESIT, including radical forms of paraphrase, such as requiring students to present the ideas, content or argument of the original in the reverse sequence.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper has reviewed a number of differences between Chinese and English *as they are used in international communication.* Our conclusions are as follows:

(1) that certain morphological features, although not individually and in themselves obstacles to comprehension, are potential complicating factors which *cumulatively*, and especially in frozen, formal, written and bureaucratic discourse, amount to a difficulty of a different order in interpretation from Chinese than equivalent problems between languages like English and French. These include complex embedding, topicalisation, subject-object-verb structure, abbreviations, condensed and allusive lexical elements, sinicisation, and the general fluidity of the language standard;

(2) that due to the relative lack of contact between East and West as compared to the history of intra-European exchange:

(a) discourse from these two civilizations carries a considerable cultural component which cannot always be conveniently explained in real-time conference situations, so that in this dimension, more is lost proportionally than in intra-European communication;

(b) the number of available individuals with sufficient knowledge to overcome this gap is limited.

(3) that the relative dominance of declarative and frozen discourse in much of the market involving Chinese activates these problems and makes them into a reality;

(4) that training courses involving non-intra-IE language combinations need to place special emphasis on cultural knowledge and more thorough familiarisation with discourse patterns to enhance understanding, retention and anticipation.

The above conclusions are based on observation of student responses and difficulties, the experience of professionals and certain characteristics of the Chinese market. Provisionally, the evidence suggests that a wide cultural gap and differences in the degree of language standardisation and stability create problems additional to those currently found in intra-IE interpretation, justifying further research on the relative impact of these factors, and adjustments in training. Any such research must encompass socio-cultural factors and the evolving nature of demand and the interpreter's role.

In writing this paper I have had to strike a difficult balance, since on the one hand, training programmes, notably in Asia, continue to be hobbled by a strange ignorance — or amnesia — of Saussure's simple distinction between *langue* and *parole*; on the other, some European writing is constrained by a fixation on the old enemies of formal linguistics, machine translation and public ignorance about the nature of language and communication. In some areas, this defensive position has taken an evangelical turn, based on hasty assumptions of universality. If quality interpretation is to be extended beyond Europe, these will have to be relinquished to allow input based on new experience.

Recent writings stressing the unity of interpretation beyond language (Choi, Zhao) may be prompted by a desire to reject 'linguistic exoticism'. Certainly, the myth of the inscrutable Orient, or invoking some mysterious absolute 'otherness' is a hackneyed old device which has been used for purposes as varied as travel advertising, political theory ('Oriental despotism'), and claiming exemption from human rights. Perhaps the former is a response to the continual pressing offers of the benefits of assumed 'universals', like 'logic' and 'common sense'. Courage to see the limitations of these positions will be needed on both sides before any cross-fertilisation can occur.

The theoretical foundations for conference interpretation training have been laid in Paris and Geneva. However, in terms of extending quality interpretation worldwide, this only represents a first stage; necessary, but not sufficient. The development of *consecutive* interpretation techniques appears as the greatest contribution of the first fifty 'European' years, since it is a tool capable of overcoming cultural differences in logic, specifically the order of presentation of arguments and information.

However, theory and training in *simultaneous* are still at a formative stage. The non-intra-IE experience holds promise for theory development in this area, since the linear constraints of SI amplify certain difficulties beyond the point where they can be satisfactorily solved by strategies proposed hitherto ('open syntax', 'explanation' of cultural differences etc.). Professionals, who know that good interpretation is enhanced by knowledge, read widely and absorb quantities of technical information for each conference. Such familiarity is crucial to the ability to anticipation and retention, which together form the key to good simultaneous. On the same principle, cross-cultural ('tele-cultural' would be more accurate, since French-English interpretation is also cross-cultural) interpretation shows that initial training must focus on extending the interpreter's familiarity with the incoming discourse beyond linguistic 'comprehension' and technical knowledge to other dimensions, from the phonetic (sinicised proper names!) to the logical and cultural. One must hope that the momentum of the trend towards learning Oriental languages in the West can be sustained, so that more IE native speakers can eventually be trained as interpreters and become trainers in their turn. Where demand is pressing (and backed with funds), the technique of 'triangular' classes which has been proposed, in which a European interpreter trains students with 'exotic' languages with the aid of an informant (Dejean 1990) is a useful temporary expedient to jump-start training in new combinations, but should not, in the long term, claim to be a substitute for mutual language acquisition.

RESEARCH — DIFFERENCE AS A CATALYST

Research in China

In the Chinese world, there has been no active centre for research on interpretation. Apart from introductions to the profession aimed at the uninitiated (Chan and Chau, Pong), specialized literature has been largely confined to conference proceedings and unpublished papers or dissertations (Chau, Fong). Several such papers reflect the increased interest in training (Fong, Wang, Wu, Zheng, Pong, Setton); others present personal experience (Liu), theorize from a sociological perspective (Li) or address and/or classify recurring technical problems (Zhuang). A thorough review is beyond the scope of this paper; however the current status of Chinese interpretation research can be broadly summarized as follows:

- in terms of the *corpus*, most of the existing literature is based on IE (usually English)-Chinese (*i.e.* non-intra-IE) interpreting, mainly in the diplomatic service and at the United Nations. There is no basis for intra-IE / non-intra-IE comparison, and cross-cultural problems are not addressed.
- in terms of the interpreting *process*, the notion of a 'processing' or interpretive step in the interpreter's mind is usually accepted (Li: 2, Wang) and the importance of context and extralinguistic knowledge recognised (Wu); at the same time there is more emphasis (than in the ESIT writing) on syntax vs. semantics and the unit of translation (Li: 6-8, Wu) less, however, from theoretical than from practical considerations (chunking).

In general, the abundance of examples, and explicit focus on 'task and subject-matter orientation' (*e.g.* at the UN-sponsored course at Beijing No. 1 School Foreign Language College: Wu, Zhuang, Wang) betoken a strongly pragmatic approach.

Except in Hong Kong writing, little or no reference is made to work done elsewhere, so that the issue of universality versus differentiation is not addressed.

Cross-cultural research

In Europe, the awkwardness of German and Russian word-order fuelled a debate which led to the surprising but liberating discovery that interpretation of spontaneous discourse depends not on syntax, but on anticipation and understanding through extralinguistic knowledge.

Contact with very different languages and cultures will lead to similar advances and pave the way for an extension of quality interpretation beyond Europe and the IE sphere. Certainly 'l'interprétation commence là ou s'arrete l'étude contrastive' (Zhao 1990: 120). But contrastive studies need not be solely linguistic; outside Europe especially, cultural, social and communications studies will all have a contribution to make in deepening the understanding which future interpreters will need.

In research on conventions of communication and discourse patterns, neither a purely written corpus, nor examples from daily conversation, are appropriate: only material encountered in international communication can form a credible basis for application to conference interpretation. Initially, such research will be hampered by the difficulty of finding real conference speeches on videotape. In the Far East, it will be made more difficult by the traditional neglect of the spoken word as a valid object of study. In spite of the *youshui* tradition of the Spring and Autumn period (a rough parallel to the Greek tradition in the West), there appears to be very little work available on oratory as such. In modern times, the new disciplines of pragmatics and discourse analysis have not as yet been enthusiastically applied to Chinese. The new field of 'discourse analysis' in Western linguistics will be only partially applicable, since most of such work deals with casual conversation or written text.

Interpreting across a wider cultural gap casts a new light on some fundamental philosophical issues, such as the definition of a message in terms of content and form. Trainees are traditionally encouraged to treat 'sense', and style, as part of the *message* to be transmitted across the culture / language gap, and sounds, words and syntax as conventions, or 'wrapping' to be discarded. How should we treat macro-structural features such as sequence, ellipse etc. ?

As to the fate of cultural substance in the interpretation process (retention, explanation or (acceptable) loss across the gap), the issue is treated as a marginal curiosity in Europe, where so much background tradition is common to the languages involved that significant differences in symbolism and allegory only affect a small part of the message; from an East-West perspective, the examples given seem trivial: the Last Trump, for instance, is announced with trombones in German and trumpets in English (Seleskovitch 1968: 115). Even if all such contrasts were lost, most intra-European messages would be virtually intact, so one can perhaps expect little understanding for the sense of massive loss which afflicts even the best East-West interpreters.

Finally, no language is adequate to our need of expression, so that speech, from whatever culture, casts some kind of semantic shadow or 'sub-text'. But the back-lighting is different. Writers on Japanese-English translation (from both East and West) describe a feeling of something unspoken or subliminal in the source text and have difficulty in pinning down its logic. Our own training experience has shown that there are aspects of the 'logic' of Western discourse which an educated Chinese does not automatically accept as 'evident' or 'clearly implied'. Failure to locate or recognise the unspoken dimension, on which much interpretation is based, is probably a key factor in driving the non-intra-IE student sceptically back to the words. Conversely, 'deep structure' and sub-text in have barely been explored in the... 'exotic' languages of cultures which have largely been on the receiving end of the flow of cross-cultural 'communication'.

Given that the interpreter has understood and has an adequate command of register, etc. how much adaptation is he allowed? Is he to convert allusive literary hints into forceful demands, and vice-versa? The answer must also depend on his role and position, which are not merely a sociological function of the relations between the communicants, but also, technically, of the constraints inherent in each mode of interpretation: our responsibility and initiative is proportional to the size of the units we are allowed to manipulate, from the linearity of simultaneous, to the relative freedom of consecutive, and finally, the diplomatic status once conferred on interpreters when the cultural differences were still patent (not yet veiled by the techno-commercial appearance of uniformity), and there was no alternative but to trust them over the whole sweep of the negotiations.

We have implied that the role of the interpreter as presented in European literature may appear somewhat ideal in the light of current Asian conditions; certainly many of the difficulties described in this paper derive from contemporary and regional customs of communication. This is not to say that interpreter trainers should adopt a passive role, accepting ritual or formalised communication as a given; on the contrary, while preparing beginners for existing realities, the profession should go on working to promote fuller, more interactive communication events which involving interpreters as full participants.

If WILSS' 'language-pair-specific' research, or the concept of typologically dissimilar languages, seem of secondary relevance to interpretation, where linguistic differences are essentially irritants (although they differ in degree according to conditions), culture-pair specificity is a reality in international communication. Our objective should be to outgrow an era in which the 'Chinese (or African, or Arabic) proverb' is a synonym for something abstruse and incomprehensible, where '*chinois*' means 'unnecessarily complicated', and where the riper forms of humour and irony are stopped, searched and defused somewhere around the International Date Line.

Note

1. *Théories du langage, théories de l'apprentissage — le débat entre Jean Piaget et Noam Chomsky*, Seuil, Paris 1979.

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