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Article abstract

This article provides a brief description of a number of guided training exercises which are used with groups and which can be used by all students outside the classroom as part of their self-training. A number of techniques aiming to develop key skills essential for any interpreter are analysed. Some definitions, including intuition, attention, concentration, dominant hemisphere/ear preference are introduced in the article with regard to interpreting. The article aims to answer the questions of what we should teach future interpreters and what kind of skills we need to teach them. Specific training for each skill is described in detail. Future interpreters should practice some psycholinguistic exercises, taking into account the fact that a major part of the work depends on self-training.The instructor's role is to aid self-preparation, and to provide some useful guidelines and exercises that can be used outside the language laboratory, without an instructor or sophisticated equipment. Some basic differences and similarities in the training of simultaneous and consecutive interpreters are analysed.

Five Principles and Five Skills for Training Interpreters

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article décrit sommairement un certain nombre d'exercices guidés pour des groupes et qui peuvent être employés par les étudiants en-dehors des cours dans le cadre de leur autoformation. On procède à l'analyse de quelques techniques visant à développer des habiletés clés essentielles pour tout interprète. On définit également certaines notions, dont celles d'*intuition*, d'*attention*, de *concentration* et de *préférence de l'hémisphère/oreille dominante*, en fonction de l'interprétation. L'article cherche à trouver ce qu'il faudrait enseigner aux futurs interprètes et quel type d'habiletés il serait nécessaire de leur enseigner. L'entraînement approprié à chaque habileté est décrit en détails. Les futurs interprètes devraient effectuer des exercices psycholinguistiques en tenant compte du fait que la plus grande partie de leur travail dépend de l'autoformation. Le rôle de l'enseignant est d'appuyer l'autopréparation et de fournir quelques lignes directrices et exercices utiles pouvant être employés à l'extérieur du laboratoire de langue sans l'aide d'un enseignant ou de tout équipement complexe. Enfin, on fera l'analyse de quelques différences et ressemblances de base dans la formation des interprètes en interprétations simultanée et consécutive.

ABSTRACT

This article provides a brief description of a number of guided training exercises which are used with groups and which can be used by all students outside the classroom as part of their self-training. A number of techniques aiming to develop key skills essential for any interpreter are analysed. Some definitions, including *intuition*, *attention*, *concentration, dominant hemisphere/ear preference* are introduced in the article with regard to interpreting. The article aims to answer the questions of what we should teach future interpreters and what kind of skills we need to teach them. Specific training for each skill is described in detail. Future interpreters should practice some psycholinguistic exercises, taking into account the fact that a major part of the work depends on self-training. The instructor's role is to aid self-preparation, and to provide some useful guidelines and exercises that can be used outside the language laboratory, without an instructor or sophisticated equipment. Some basic differences and similarities in the training of simultaneous and consecutive interpreters are analysed.

MOTS-CLÉS/KEYWORDS

simultaneous, consecutive, interpreting, training, psycholinguistic

Stephen B. Pearl, a renowned practising interpreter, criticises some of the existing traditions in testing and, supposedly, "training" of interpreters in his article "Lacuna, myth and shibboleth in teaching simultaneous interpreting." His arguments are very interesting and I am grateful to him for his courage in raising such an important issue. At the same time, all his criticisms lack a very important component which makes them destructive rather than constructive: he offers no positive programme or

guidelines for training. That Pearl has constructive ideas about training is clear — he has run workshops on training interpreters, but unfortunately in his article he didn't give any details of these.

I would like to offer the reader some of my own conclusions and ideas, including some integral elements of the methods I use to prepare interpreters (from English into Russian and into Spanish).

Two for the price of one or *Buy one and get one free*

One important deficiency is a lack of experienced interpreters working as experienced instructors (Pearl 1995: 162, 181). There are some simple reasons for this: like good athletes, even very good interpreters are themselves quite non-analytical and oblivious to their *modus operandi*, which means that not all good interpreters (or athletes) can work successfully as good instructors. Secondly, the practice of simultaneous interpreting is significantly more financially rewarding than the teaching of it (Pearl 1995: 181).

In my professional career and even in my university studies (St. Petersburg State University, 1977-1983) I managed to combine both: I was studying and then teaching languages at a high university level as well as working as a professional interpreter (Russian-Spanish-Russian in Russia and Cuba). Moreover, even as an undergraduate I was specifically trained to teach Russian as a foreign language and I also received very good professional training as an interpreter (Russian-Spanish-Russian), which helped me to work successfully and simultaneously in both areas after graduation.

All my personal work experience (as a Russian language teacher and as an interpreter) led me to the idea of designing a kind of "ideal course" for future interpreters (into Russian first, and into Spanish or any other European language later) which could be applied in part or in full to the existing university curriculum and equipment.

A first, experimental course was successfully tested at St. Petersburg State University, Russia, as an optional extra for foreign students studying Russian (1992-94), then at the University of Glasgow, Scotland (1996, English-Spanish third or fourth year option; 1995-96, Phil in Interpreting: Russian-English), and finally at the University of Bradford, England (1997-98, English-Russian and English-Spanish Post-Graduate — MA in Interpreting).

As a result of that practical work, a book *Grammar of Interpreting/Interpreter's Working Note-book* was prepared and an article on the "Theory and Practice of Interpreting and Teaching Methodology" was published in *Rusística* magazine (1996), where I explained my approach to solving the main problems.

In this article, I intend to provide a brief description of a number of guided training exercises which I use in my teaching work with groups and which can be used by all the students outside the classroom as part of their self-training.

There are some basic principles that I follow in my teaching:

The first principle is:
Before introducing any new training exercise, explain its potential value for psycholinguistic and professional reasons and explain how it can be adapted by interpreters later in different circumstances.

Example: a self-training exercise to improve attention and concentration and to make both hemispheres work synchronically. It can be used in any environment with moving or parked cars.

The most simple exercise is to go along any street, trying to repeat all the digits and letters of all the car number plates (going either in the same or the opposite direction).

Next level of difficulty: do the same and simultaneously translate or convert the same number plates from language 1 (L1) into language 2 (L2).

Next level of difficulty: do the same, simultaneously translating the plates into L2 and counting the number of cars in each colour in either L1 or L2 (e.g. 5 reds, 7 whites, 4 cherry, etc.)

Final level of difficulty: do the same, simultaneously translating the plates into L2 and counting the number of cars in each colour in both languages (e.g. five reds, *siete blancos* <"7 whites" in Spanish>, 4 cherry, *ocho negros* <"8 blacks" in Spanish>, etc.)

The second principle is:
Increase the self-confidence of students, particularly where their memory is concerned. This is absolutely necessary, because almost all students complain of not being able to memorise new information or retain certain pieces of important data in their short- and long-term memory (STM and LTM).

Example: an exercise with interesting or funny data which is used in order to demonstrate to students that they can easily remember quite complicated data so long as it is *important* or *interesting* to them. Here I explain how our memory works and how it deals with the important and non-important information which we intend to memorise.

The exercise is called "*Very Interesting*" or "*Muy Interesante*" and it is a dictation of short texts containing interesting figures, dates or plusmarks, etc. For example: "*The American fast-food chain Macdonald's, appeared for the first time in 1955, but it had no tables or chairs until 1966.*" The dictation may be in either language or may alternate between the two languages once self-confidence is gained and the exercise is being used purely to train STM and LTM.

The third principle is:
Work hard on the students' concentration and level of attention from the very beginning.

Example: An exercise with distractions, like extra sounds, excessive gesticulation, etc. This kind of "distractive modelled environment" I call "training in *obstacled conditions*." Any instructor can create his or her own list of distractions, depending on the level of the group or the specific aim. For more information about my approach to training in difficult conditions, see my article in *Rusistica* magazine.

The fourth principle is:
A new exercise has to be very clear and straightforward in order to be understood and worked through the first time (with a short debriefing afterwards). Next time, the training exercise has to be difficult (an authentic or nearly real-life level of difficulty). A *"real-life level of difficulty"* refers mainly to the speed of presentation or the sentence complexity, or a lot of specific vocabulary.

The fifth principle is:
It is not my task to teach vocabulary.

Firstly, this is because the trainee interpreters studying the MA in Interpreting *de facto* have to have a "sufficient" level of proficiency in L2 and L3. It is the primary criterion for admission to such MA courses. The aim is clear: we do not teach languages, we teach "*interpreting*."

Secondly, I think in any case that it is a waste of time to teach new vocabulary on a word-to-word level in MA courses. It is the students' responsibility to learn vocabulary all the time if they want to be professional interpreters. At the same time the "ideal course" may include some specific hours of training dedicated purely to word-to-word drills (not teaching) from L1 into L2, alternating both languages all the time.

It is necessary to recognise that most of the modern schools of interpreting at undergraduate and PG level use a lot of linguistic methods in their teaching practice, working on vocabulary on a word-to-word basis and on sentence, paragraph and whole text structures, as well as providing a huge amount of theoretical information. At the same time, they ignore (or simply *omit*) certain psycholinguistic techniques — such as those I have described above — which are essential for any professional interpreter (working with both simultaneous — SI and consecutive — CI interpreting). Pearl, in the article mentioned above, makes some very precise and critical observations on this point.

Below are a number of techniques used in my classes in order to help students develop a number of skills that I recognise as essential for any interpreter. Before we turn to these techniques, it is important to clarify some definitions, including *intuition*, *attention*, *concentration, dominant hemisphere/ear preference*.

Intuition is considered by some Russian psychologists (see Granovskaya Rada *et al.* 1991) as simultaneous interaction between the right and left hemispheres of our brain. When "intuition" is activated, a kind of "bridge" is established in order to secure an interchange of information stored in the two different "storage rooms," or hemispheres. Each "room" contains unique material. The "bridge" is necessary in order to be able to make them work simultaneously. A very similar mechanism is required for interpreting, where a person has to be able to "switch" between the different "language storage rooms" where L1, L2 and L3 are focused. The exact location of each one does not matter; what counts is the ability to build a successful "bridge" between them as quickly as possible.

The majority of people are right-handed, a smaller group are left-handed and finally an even smaller group is ambidextrous (equal dexterity in both hands). Why is this information relevant to interpreting? Each hemisphere responds to certain specific "functions": analysis, synthesis, speech, co-ordination, emotions, etc. Therefore, in general terms, according to whether we are right or left handed we can be divided into "analysts" and "creators" or, in other words, into "mathematicians" and "poets," or "executives" and "artists." For the purely practical purpose of interpreter training, it is not so important to know the exact location of the speech zones in our hemispheres, i.e. right or left. What *is* of great significance is the ability to make both hemispheres co-ordinate their active functions almost at the same time, by building a kind of "bridge." It is in fact more important for simultaneous interpreting than for consecutive interpreting because of the time factor.

It is no less significant as one of the factors that we can observe and measure when testing the ability of trainee interpreters to perform their future professional duties on a purely cerebral level without any language interference. NON-verbal tests are adopted for that purpose. NON-verbal tests demonstrate a person's ability to perform a certain type of brain activity, which, in general terms, is similar to the cognitive process that takes place in the brain while interpreting (mainly simultaneously).

The first test measures the velocity of cognitive (or creative) processes while solving NEW non-verbal problems. It is based on a test developed by the famous Russian pedagogue Boris Nikitin, who formulated the universal law of *"Irreversible Extinction of the Possibility for Effective Development of Abilities:* ***IEPEDA****."* He worked a lot with "normal" children and adults, observing their creativity level "growing" while using the so-called "developmental games." There is a clear correlation between the speed of exchange between hemispheres and the velocity of creative problem-solving. The greater the speed, the better the creative performance of the tested person and the higher the chance of them becoming a good simultaneous or consecutive interpreter. I consider that near-native fluency in two or more languages (source and target) is a necessary requirement but by no means the only or the most important element to be developed by the future interpreter. As far as I know, language skills can be developed and improved, but the capacity for fast and effective hemisphere exchange is more of an innate capability, so it is essential to know from the very beginning what a person's capacity is. However, as Boris Nikitin states, it is never too late to learn, and a training exercise which includes "developmental non-verbal games" can help improve the professional interpreter's performance considerably. Different types of puzzle games like Rubik cubes can help the future interpreter increase hemisphere interaction.

The second test determines whether the tested student is left- or right-handed. This knowledge may be important if the instructor is to offer different "tasks" to students according to their left or right hand preference. Nobody questions the difference between "Western" and "Oriental" models of learning, but there is a gap in research into mechanisms that make a difference to our learning processes depending on our hand dominance.

Attention

As research has shown, it is impossible to divide someone's attention between two independent actions when both require the maximum level of concentration. Even long and persistent training cannot help overcome such a problem (see Granovskaya 1997: 52).

Concentration

Concentration vs ***Dispersed Attention***

Dispersed attention can be compared with light which passes through a matte crystal and illuminates a large square. If we use lenses instead of a matte crystal, the illuminated spot would be considerably smaller but brighter. The **concentration of attention** focuses our perception on one item, while other — peripheral — objects disappear. Research on the cerebral activity in a state of deep concentration reveals that there is no asymmetrical activity at that specific moment and that both hemispheres work together *simultaneously* (see Granovskaya 1997: 60).

Interconnectability between activities

Interconnectability is defined by the speed of transition from one type of activity to another. Dispersed attention allows us to maintain several different objects within our field of attention. The more "passive" or "relaxed" the condition of a person, the better the result of our "dispersed" attention activity. The instructor's role is to explain this and create the necessary conditions while teaching. Self-confidence can help considerably to create "relaxed" conditions during the process of simultaneous interpreting (see Granovskaya 1997: 62-63).

Ear preference/hemisphere dominance

There is a clear dependence on the dominant hemisphere and the dominant eye. Is there any similar dependence between the dominant hemisphere and the dominant or "comfortable" ear for interpreters?

There is still no definitive answer to the question about right/left ear preferences for professional interpreters, but some practising interpreters claim that by moving one headphone slightly off one ear they manage to focus better on the incoming message through the headphone into one ear, and to monitor their own delivery in L2 with the other, partially released ear.

It is still unclear whether it is the same ear as their so called "telephone ear" or whether right-handed and left-handed interpreters always release the same ear when interpreting from L1 into L2 and from L2 into L1, but one thing is certain: each trainee has to try to find his/her "comfortable ear" for each of the language combinations. In my practical classes, I inform my trainees in simultaneous interpreting about such a possibility and ask them to try each ear with each language combination. Some of them realize immediately during the training that one of the ears is "more comfortable" for them; others need more time and more self-observation.

So what should we teach future interpreters? My answer is: *techniques of interpreting*. What does this mean? What kind of skills do we need to teach them?

These skills are:

1. to listen in L1;
2. to understand in L1;
3. to memorise the information in L1;
4. to mentally translate, compress and "edit" the message from L1 into L2;
5. a) **for consecutive interpreting:**
   and finally to *verbalise* the message in L2;
5. b) **for simultaneous interpreting:**
   and finally to *verbalise* the message in L2 while listening to the new portion in L1.

Specific training for each skill may include:

1. listening A

mainly requires a lot of attention and concentration, which is why it is necessary:

- to introduce some "distracting" or "annoying" elements, such as sounds (background noises), flashing lights, excessive gesticulation, and so on, in order to make it more difficult and impede aural recognition;
- to work simultaneously with two different texts both in L1;
- to work simultaneously with two different texts both in L2;
- to work simultaneously with two different texts: one in L1 and the other in L2;

- to use "shadowing," i.e. reading the text aloud while the trainer simultaneously reads the same text aloud, introducing some new elements (changing figures, names, tenses, verbs, adjectives, etc.) with the comparison of the two texts at the end;
- to introduce *phonemic* shadowing, which involves repeating each sound exactly as it was heard without waiting for a complete meaning unit. This specific skill helps to develop the mechanical aspect of simultaneous interpreting, in other words the ability to listen and speak simultaneously.

listening B: Selective Listening combined with phrase shadowing/paraphrasing

- While practising so-called "selective listening," the trainee is exposed to two different verbal messages simultaneously, each message coming through to a different ear. The task consists in "switching off" the ear with the "irrelevant" message and focusing all the attention on the "relevant" verbal text. This specific training concludes either with phrase shadowing of the "relevant" incoming message or with later paraphrasing it.

2. **understanding**

requires mainly language guessing and predicting skills.

- Speed of presentation in L1 is very important: interpreters should be trained to understand the highest speed possible.
- Dialects and individual particularities of articulation (including defective ones) is another area for training. It is especially important for European languages such as English, Spanish or French.
- The capability for good linguistic guessing, predicting and anticipating elements in sequence can be trained by introducing unfinished sentences in both languages (L1 and L2). This training is also especially important to develop the interpreter's ability to "edit" unfinished or cut phrases produced by some people in their spontaneous speech.

3. **memorise the information in L1**

requires skills such as instant, short, medium and long term active memory. It is necessary to work on:

- the capacity to encode and decode texts using any symbol system (for consecutive interpreting);
- a good ear for any foreign names and toponyms;
- a good ear for figures and measures;

Special training is required for all of these skills. Very useful exercises include:

  - memorising poems, prose, radio news;
  - regular dictation on figures, names and measures first in L1, then in L2 and finally mixing both languages in one dictation.

4. **translation A (mentally)**

requires important skills such as the ability to compose edited texts based on certain key-words (or symbols for consecutive interpreting) or good "editing" and text compression. Such skills need special training using the *key-words* methodology. The main options might be as follows:

- No previous presentation of any text, key-words are given in L1 and the task is to make an "edited" sensible text in L1.
- No previous presentation of any text, key-words are given in L2 and the task is to make an "edited" sensible text in L2.
- No previous presentation of any text, key-words are given in L1 and the task is to make an "edited" sensible text in L2.
- No previous presentation of any text, key-words are given in L2 and the task is to make an "edited" sensible text in L1.
- No previous presentation of any text, key-words are given in both L1 and L2 and the task is to make an "edited" sensible text in L1.

- No previous presentation of any text, key-words are given in both L1 and L2 and the task is to make an "edited" sensible text in L2.

translation B (sight)

- sight translation;
- sight interpreting.

5. verbalisation

requires the following skills to be developed:

for simultaneous interpreting:

- to speak while listening;
- the simultaneous "editing" of texts (working with macro-blocks on a syntagmatic level and "finishing unfinished sentences");

for consecutive interpreting:

- immediate "editing" in L2 of large pieces of texts using encoded or encrypted key-words.

Verbalisation and "editing" require the training of paraphrasing ability, which starts in L1 using key-words and some common symbols and then continues in L2.

Conclusions

The training of future interpreters should necessarily include some psycholinguistic training, taking into account the fact that a major part of the work depends on the self-training of the students. The instructor's role is to aid self-preparation, providing some useful guidelines and exercises that can be used outside the language laboratory, without an instructor or sophisticated equipment. The aim of this article is to offer some general ideas concerning the self-training of future interpreters and the role of the instructor. Some basic differences and similarities in the training of simultaneous and consecutive interpreters are analysed.

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