**Interpretation Techniques**

If you require an interpreter, you need to know which technique will be best for conveying your message correctly and at the right time.

**Liaison Interpretation** The interpreter translates a few of the speaker’s sentences at a time; his counterpart replies and the interpreter translates these sentences back to the speaker. Liaison interpreters work both ways, so conversations take twice as long. Suitable for: business presentations, press conferences, guided tours, negotiations, interviews or executing deeds and contracts.

**Consecutive Interpretation** Speakers talk for 6 to 8 minutes; the interpreter takes notes and then relays a true and accurate version of the speaker’s narrative in the other language. Consecutive interpretation is time-intensive and is therefore not used very often. Suitable for: meetings with few attendees and business presentations for a small audience. Neither liaison nor consecutive interpreters use any special equipment.

**Simultaneous Interpretation** This is one of the most intensive interpretation techniques and requires utmost concentration. That is why these interpreters work in sound-proof booths and listen to the speaker’s voice by means of headphones. While the speaker addresses the audience, the interpreter converts his words into another language. The audience use wireless headphones. Simultaneous interpretation is most often used at conferences, which is why simultaneous interpreters are also known as conference interpreters. Simultaneous interpretation is very taxing. This is why two interpreters are required for each language, taking turns every 20-30 minutes. Built-in booths are common at conference venues, or mobile booths may be used at virtually every other location (even outdoors!). Many suppliers of sound equipment also provide specialized interpreting equipment.

**Whispered Interpretation** is a lot like simultaneous interpretation, but the interpreter sits next to one or two audience members and translates the speaker’s words, in whispers, during the speech. Whispered interpretation requires the undivided attention of the interpreter, because he or she can be easily distracted. Moreover, other guests may be bothered by the interpreter whispering in another language. Whispered interpretation can also be done by means of a ‘tour guide system’, a mobile and wireless system with headphones for several members of the audience and a sensitive microphone for the interpreter. Whispered interpretation is taxing primarily because the interpreter has to rely on unamplified, unfiltered ambient sound. This is why two interpreters take turns during long presentations, to guarantee the quality of your presentation in the target language.

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**FIVE PRINCIPLES AND FIVE SKILLS FOR TRAINING INTERPRETERS**

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. Sometimes Pearl offers workshops where he shares his approach to training interpreters, but for obvious reasons this is not the case in his article.

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 of the first deficiencies which notices is a lack of experienced interpreters working as experienced instructors (Pearl 1995: 162, 181). There are some basic reasons for that: like good athletes, even very good interpreters are themselves quite non-analytical and oblivious in 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 on several occasions for almost 4 years). 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 or adapted partly or almost fully to the existing university curriculum and equipment.

A first, experimental course was formally successfully tested at St-Petersburg State University, Russia, as optional extra for foreign students studying Russian (1992-94, advanced level groups), then at the University of Glasgow, Scotland (1996, English-Spanish third or fourth year option, 1995/96 MPhil in Interpreting: - Russian-English), and finally at the University of Bradford, England (1997/98, English-Russian and English-Spanish PG - 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 "Rusistica" 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 practical teaching work:

**The first principle is:**

Before starting to work with any new training exercise, explain its potential value or psycholinguistic and professional reasons and explain how it can be used or adapted by interpreters later in other circumstances.

**Example**: a self-training exercise to improve or achieve full 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 my students particularly where their memory is concerned. This is definitely necessary because almost all of them complain about 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 my 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 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 swap 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 4th 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 5th 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, in any case I think that it is a waste of time to teach new vocabulary on a word-to-word level on MA courses. It is the student's responsibility to do it 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, altering both languages all the time.

It is necessary to recognise that most of the modern schools of interpreting (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 and consecutive interpreting - SI and CI). 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 the aim of which is to develop a number of skills that I recognise as essential for any interpreter. Before we turn to those 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 a simultaneous interaction between the right and left hemispheres in 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.

People can be divided into three groups of differing sizes: the majority are right-handed, a smaller group are left-handed and finally an even smaller group is made up of ambidextrous individuals (equal dexterity in both hands). Why is this information relevant to interpreting? Each hemisphere responds to certain specific "duties" of human activity: 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 future interpreters to perform their future professional duties on a purely cerebral level without any language interference. Therefore some NON-verbal tests were adopted for that purpose.

I would like to focus on the NON-verbal character of the tests because it demonstrates 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 our head 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 we are dealing with. 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 the hemispheres' interaction.

The second test determines the group to which the tested student belongs: left- or right-handed. This knowledge may be important if the instructor is to offer different “tasks” to his or her 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 with light focused on it would be considerably smaller but brighter. The **concentration of attention** focuses our perception on one item, while other - peripheral - objects disappear from it. 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. The 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 a "relaxed" condition during the process of SI (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 official final result on a right/left ear preference for professional interpreters, but some practising interpreters claim that removing one headphone slightly off one ear they manage to focus better on the incoming message with one ear next to the headphone and 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 already is clear: each one of the trainees has to try to find his/her “comfortable ear” for each of the language combinations. In my practical classes I just inform my PG students, 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 class 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?

Those 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.

Separate training for each skill may include:

***1.- listening A***

This 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, etc. in order to make it more difficult/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 reads the same text simultaneously, 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.

***1.- listening B: Selective Listening combined with phrase shadowing/paraphrasing***

* While practising the so-called “selective listening” , the trainee is exposed to two different verbal messages. Each incoming message is presented to one ear through headphones. In such a case, the trainee is receiving two different incoming messages simultaneously. The task consists in “switching off” one of the ears through which comes 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: train interpreters for 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***

This 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.

***4.- translation B (sight)***

* sight translation;
* sight interpreting.

***5.- verbalisation***

This 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" imply the "re-telling" or paraphrasing ability training 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, to aid self-preparation, is to provide some useful guidelines and exercises that can be used outside the language laboratory, without an instructor and without any 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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