

Simultaneous Interpreting: Principles and Training

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Abstract—Nowadays, there is an increasing demand for simultaneous interpreting in China. This paper introduces the definition and the process of simultaneous interpreting. And then, it proposes the general principles and techniques for simultaneous interpreting, and provides practical self-training methods.

Index Terms—simultaneous interpreting, principles, training

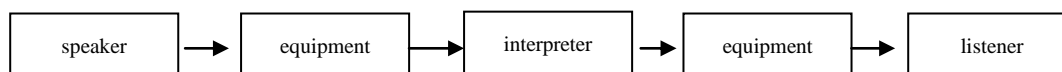
With the development of the reform and opening as well as China's entry into WTO, the cooperation and exchanges between China and the outside world are becoming increasingly frequent. At present, more and more important and large-scale international conferences are held in China, which means that China needs a large number of simultaneous interpreters who are the bridge among different languages. To a large extent, the quality of simultaneous interpretation directly affects whether the two sides can exchange and communicate smoothly. However, simultaneous interpreting is a tough job which requests the interpreters to possess high comprehensive quality and wonderful professional skills. How to effectively improve the quality of simultaneous interpreting? It is crucial for the interpreters to master the relevant principles and skills about simultaneous interpreting. In this paper, the author will explain the nature of the simultaneous interpreting, introduce the process of simultaneous interpreting and explore the basic principles and skills, then provide related self-training methods.

I. SIMULTANEOUS INTERPRETING

Language interpreting or interpretation is the intellectual activity of facilitating oral and sign-language communication, either simultaneously or consecutively, between two or more users of different languages. A simultaneous interpreter is - as you can tell by looking at the words - someone who interprets for someone in another language while the speaker speaks without interruption. This is the opposite of consecutive interpreting, because a consecutive interpreter awaits his turn and does not start speaking until the speaker allows him the time to do so. Simultaneous interpreting is one of the most common kinds of interpreting, but also the most difficult one. Very few translators (who are used to getting the time to really think about their translations) can do it, and not even all interpreters can do it well.

Simultaneous interpreting has a number of indisputable advantages over consecutive interpreting: (1) efficiency in conducting international events in which several languages are used; (2) less expenditure of time and money: the event proceeds at its own pace regardless of the language of the speaker — this decreases the time necessary to hold the event and the material resources required; (3) convenience for the listeners: the participants can hear the presentation in the original language without interruption for translation.

It is really a very complex process to interpret simultaneously, one that only very few interpreters can handle well. A speaker is speaking, and that speaker does not stop or pause. He keeps talking. Therefore the interpreter must do the following while the speaker is talking: listen to what the speaker is saying; translate it in his mind; render the translation in his microphone; and (and this is the most difficult part) at the same time listen to what is being said while he is speaking himself.



This requires a kind of mental miracle, and that is why it is an unusually demanding and complex activity to carry out, one that requires an unusual level of concentration, which tires out the interpreter rather soon – which affects his concentration, which, in turn, affects his performance.

II. BASIC PRINCIPLES

Simultaneous interpreting is not only an art, but also a technology. Therefore, there are certain basic principles can be

followed during the process of interpreting in order to achieve goals more efficiently. The following principles can be employed to guide our simultaneous interpreting:

A. *Syntactic Linearity*

According to the original structure of the sentence that a interpreter has heard, he divides the whole sentence into several parts, and then combines them together with various skills to express the entire meaning. For example, “suo you ren // dou ke yi jie zhu hu lian wang zi yuan // lai xue xi, bu lun ta men shi na ge min zu // he zhong xing bie // he zhong fu se, // zhi yao ta men ke yi jie ru hu lian wang.” (“所有人 // 都可以借助互联网资源 // 来学习, 不论他们是哪个民族 // 何种性别 // 何种肤色, // 只要他们可以接入互联网。”) Translation: “All can study // by relying on internet resources // regardless of their race, nationality and sex // providing that // they could have access to the internet.” Simultaneous interpreting requests the interpreter to give the target version nearly at the same time with the speaker’s speech, and a qualified simultaneous interpreter should try his best to shorten the time between interpreting and speaking, therefore, the method to interpret based on the original structure is an important feature in simultaneous interpreting.

B. *Adjustment*

It is a vital step in the interpreting process. The interpreter should adjust structure, correct mistakes and add the missing information with the new content he receives. In English, the adverbial modifiers about time and place are usually placed in the end of a sentence, which is quite different from the Chinese structure. Based on the original structure, such sentence “I went to Holiday Inn // for a seminar // at 10 o’clock // yesterday.” will be interpreted into “wo qu le jia ri jiu dian // can jia yi ge yan tao hui // zai shi dian zhong // zuo tian.” (“我去了假日酒店 // 参加一个研讨会 // 在十点钟 // 昨天。”) Here, adjustment will play an important role in making the target version better. In fact, such sentence will be handled like this: “wo qu jia ri jiu dian // can jia le yi ge yan tao hui // shi jian shi zuo tian shang wu shi dian.” (“我去假日酒店 // 参加了一个研讨会 // 时间是昨天上午十点。”)

C. *Anticipation*

A good simultaneous interpreter should know how to predict what the speaker would say next with his own language ability, knowledge and experience, which can save a lot of time and energy, thus following the pace of the speaker. For instance, in lots of conferences, such cliché is used in the opening ceremony: “... wo jin dai biao ... // dui yu hui dai biao biao shi re lie de huan yin // bing yu zhu ben ci da hui qu de yuan man cheng gong!” (“.....我谨代表..... // 对与会代表表示热烈的欢迎 // 并预祝本次大会取得圆满成功!”) During interpreting, with the help of his own experience, the interpreter can interpret the whole sentence “Please allow me to be on behalf of ... to extend to our warmest welcome to the participants of this conference ...” when the speaker says “wo jin dai biao ...” (“我谨代表.....”) and he should predict what the speaker will say next is “... ben ci hui yi cheng gong” (“..... 本次会议成功”) when he hears “yu zhu...” (“预祝.....”).

D. *Reformulation*

Reformulation is the overall strategy in simultaneous interpreting. There is a great deal of difference between English and Chinese, so it is impossible to interpret word to word. Reformulation can help interpreter to reorganize the original information according to the convention of target language. An interpreter can interpret the sentence “shui dou you lao de na yi tian” (“谁都有老的那一天”) into “Gravity catches everybody.”, because Westerners always believe that gravity should be blamed for aging and skin laxity etc. In a word, what an interpreter should deliver is the meaning not the language.

E. *Simplification*

It asks the simultaneous interpreter to simplify the words to explain, induce and generalize the original content without affecting the convey of main information when he meets some difficulties which he can not handle with the target language or some technical materials which is hard for the listeners to understand. Once, such words appeared in a conference aiming at introducing “EU Agricultural Policy” to adolescents: “If the CIF price of produce at the community boarder is below the guideline price as determined under the Common Market Organization, then at levy, which is not a tariff duty, is imposed.” There are a lot of words difficult for young people to understand, if interpreted directly and faithfully. So, an interpreter should simplify some difficult points and deliver the whole meaning with simple expressions: “If farm produce comes into the Community at a price below the official Community market price, a special agricultural levy is imposed. (ru guo nong chan pin jin ru ou gong ti de jia ge di yu ou gong ti de guan fang jia ge de hua, jiu yao zheng shou nong ye te bie shui. / 如果农产品进入欧共体的价格低于欧共体的官方价格的话, 就要征收农业特别税。)

F. *Faithfulness*

It is always regarded as the criterion to evaluate translation. But it is hard to follow it in simultaneous interpreting because interpreters have not enough time to think and deal during interpreting. What the interpreter can do is try to

deliver all the meaning and most of the information the speaker expresses in the way which listeners can accept easily.

III. SELF-TRAINING METHODS

In *Basic Concepts and Models for Interpreter and Translator Training*, the famous interpreting professor Daniel Gile (1995:179) generalizes the mode of simultaneous interpreting: $SI = L + M + P + C$. That is simultaneous interpreting = listening and analysis + short-term memory effort + speech production + coordination. All of that needs the interpreter to spend a lot of time and energy. To be a good and qualified simultaneous interpreter, besides his own gift and experience, a strong will and perseverance, he should receive some training to gain adequate ability and knowledge.

A. Shadowing Exercise

Learners repeat what they have heard such as speech, news at the same pace. The purpose of the training is to cultivate learners' split of attention and the skill of speaking while listening. It is better to do this training in mother tongue at first, and then other languages. At the beginning stage, learners can repeat immediately after they hear something; little by little, they should delay and then repeat. When training, they should listen, speak and think at the same time. Even after repeating for 10 minutes, they can still retell the main idea. Thus, after 2 or 3 months, they can step into next stage.

B. Outlining Exercise

It is the continuing stage of shadowing exercise. Reading a paragraph after a speaker or someone else, learners should pause to outline its main idea, firstly in mother tongue, then in foreign languages.

C. Simulation Training

If possible, learners can carry out simulation training, which will create a real situation and atmosphere. They set the themes, prepare speeches, deliver the speeches in turn and interpret simultaneously in turn with the related necessary equipments. Of course, if some famous specialists are invited to give assess, it will be more useful. This method not only trains learners interpreting skills but also helps them to master another important skill – public speech.

At present, more and more meetings need simultaneous interpreting in China, and the demand for interpreters has become very urgent. However, simultaneous interpreting is a real difficult task. It has its own characteristics and laws. To perform the simultaneous interpretation well, people are requested to have a good quality and psychological quality as well as being good at grasping the principles and techniques. We believe that with an increasing number of people showing love and interest in the cause, multitudes of first-class simultaneous interpreters will emerge in China.

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