

DEVELOPING NOTE-TAKING SKILLS IN CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETING

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ABSTRACT

Note-taking is an essential skill for consecutive interpreters. Intended solely for the interpreter's immediate use as a memory-efficiency supplement, it is highly specific and, as a result, largely incomprehensible. However, according to the author, it still has some sort of system. Once the interpreter has mastered note-taking, he or she may be considered to have developed a note-taking system, which can be governed by certain principles. This article presents Rozan's seven fundamental note-taking principles to help interpreters improve their skills. Additionally, the author emphasizes that excellent skills can only be acquired through sufficient practice.

Keywords: note-taking; Chinese-English consecutive interpreting; principles; practice.

Introduction

Interpretation occurs when a person verbally translates what he or she hears into another language. In general, there are two predominant modes of interpretation: simultaneous and consecutive. In simultaneous interpreting, the audience hears the interpretation simultaneously with the speech, whereas in consecutive interpreting, the interpreter must interpret between chunks of the original speech (or rather, immediately after the original speaker has completed a few connected sentences or, in most cases, a lengthy paragraph). Since consecutive interpretation does not require well-equipped booths or a sophisticated electrical system, it is utilised in a wider variety of settings.

Evidently, consecutive interpreting requires many interpreter skills, including language knowledge, listening, memory, concentration, comprehension, and note-taking. Due to the fact that the original speaker could speak for up to 15 minutes and that the interpretation is typically required to be a complete rendition of the original speech rather than a summary in another language, note-taking is the most important skill. Without taking notes, it is difficult to do a good work. A notable advantage of consecutive interpreting is that the interpreter has more time to consider and take notes, allowing for a more accurate translation. Although note-taking is essential for consecutive interpreting,



paradoxically, it can also be viewed as "evil" because it can divide one's concentration and interfere with listening. Especially for novices in consecutive interpreting, taking notes is an exasperating task. Nevertheless, through adequate practise guided by the principles of note-taking in interpreting, one can acquire the necessary skills. First, let's examine the unique characteristics of note-taking in consecutive interpretation.

Two Special Features of Note-taking in Consecutive Interpretation

Due to the fact that consecutive interpreting note-taking is intended solely for the interpreter's immediate use, there are two distinguishing characteristics that set it apart from typical classroom and meeting note-taking.

First, the purpose of taking notes is to improve memory efficacy, not to record every word spoken. Only with high memory efficiency can the interpreter guarantee work accuracy. As excessive note-taking may decrease rather than improve memory capacity in interpreting, it should not be overworked. Always keep in mind that memory based on correct comprehension plays the most important role in ensuring the accuracy of interpretation, not taking notes. As a result, note-taking in consecutive interpreting should only concentrate on key information such as time, numbers, proper names of people and locations, etc., that are mentioned in a speech.

Second, the interpreter's notes have a particularly unique personality. Practising interpreters develop their own note-taking strategies. Some use a large number of symbols, while others use very few. The notes of one individual would likely be unintelligible to any other reader. Therefore, it is neither appropriate nor feasible for a novice to replicate mechanically "a system of notes" utilised for years by, say, an experienced interpreter. A novice should not do so any more than a patient should utilise "a prescription prepared for someone else".

With an understanding of the two unique characteristics of note-taking in consecutive interpretation, it should be clear why novices are not advised to write everything down or blindly follow veteran interpreters. Those who are trained to become future interpreters should first strive to create a note-taking system that is most suitable for themselves by drawing on the experiences or ideas of veteran interpreters or interpretation researchers. In this regard, the section that follows will present a number of useful principles proposed by researchers and veteran interpreters.

Some Useful Principles in Note-taking

Roza'n's seven basic principles

Jean-Francois Roza'n (1956, see Phelan, 2001, p.10) put together some ideas to help interpreters with the task of note-



taking in his book *La prise de notes en consécutive*. Rozan established seven basic principles which are still useful today:

1. Note the idea rather than the exact words used.
2. Abbreviate long words by noting the first two and the last two letters only. Alternatively, find a short word with the same meaning.
3. Abbreviations of linking words are important:

as, why	to mean because, as, given that, for this reason
tho	although, despite
but	however, nevertheless
if	supposing
as to	as regards, regarding, concerning
ths	thus, in other words, to conclude, in conclusion

4. Negation

OK	to approve
no OK	to disapprove

5. Underlying to stress importance or significance

int	interesting
int	very interesting
?	an important questing

6. Work down the page. Group ideas intelligently. Use a line to separate ideas. Number pages to avoid confusion. Cross off each section as you interpret it.

7. Symbols

Symbols of expression

:	to express thought or belief
”	to express what is said, declared or affirmed
⊙	symbol of discussion
OK	symbol of approbation

Indeed, it is not possible to use abbreviations or symbols to

depict each and every term and word encountered during interpretation. Razon's seven basic note-taking principles are only useful if they enable the interpreter to quickly record the speaker's words and recall them promptly after the speech. Therefore, one should not memorise these principles mechanically, but rather use them as a guide for the practise of interpreting.

Improving Note-taking Skills Step by Step

Good note-taking skills in consecutive interpreting can only be acquired gradually through practise. According to what has been said, an interpreter with excellent note-taking skills should take notes rapidly and thoroughly, which will allow him or her to recall the original information promptly and interpret it with minimal loss. Consequently, his or her notes should be succinct, logical, and legible. To achieve this objective, the interpreter must first strive to comprehend the original speaker's ideas with as few words or symbols as feasible. In practise, one approach is to practise note-taking while repeatedly interpreting a brief paragraph, while attempting to reduce the number of words or symbols written down each time. As no beginner can take excellent notes in a single attempt, note-taking skills can only be enhanced gradually.

Note-taking of the following paragraph can serve as a good example for the step-by-step improvement:

I'm very happy to have the privilege to attend the conference, and address the topic of "Change and Global Economy." Throughout the history there have been periods characterized by themes. The theme that characterizes our age is rapid change. Advances in transportation, medicine, and the nature of political or commercial relationships have all changed rapidly, with great impact on societies across the world. We should remember the philosophical statement that "The art of progress is to preserve order amid change, and to preserve change amid order."

Step-by-step improvement of note-taking skills suggests that although there may be many useful principles and hints in consecutive note-taking, the training of such a fundamental skill in consecutive interpreting does not require any special tricks; all that beginners of consecutive interpretation need to do is gain experience daily through practise. The interpreter can eventually take concise, logical, and legible notes automatically and in his or her own style with sufficient practise. Only then can the interpreter be considered to have developed a particular note-taking system.

Conclusion

Note-taking in consecutive interpreting is fraught with



contradictions: it is both necessary and evil; individual and principled; memory-enhancing and memory-impairing. Some people find note-taking in consecutive interpreting incomprehensible, while others believe it follows a system. According to the author, both arguments are plausible but only partially accurate. It is incomprehensible because it is highly individualised and shaped by an individual's reasoning and writing style. It has some sort of system, as it adheres to certain principles and allows users to create their own note-taking system. In consecutive interpreting, the only method to establish a "unfathomable" system of note-taking is through extensive practise. Only practise makes an interpreter flawless.

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