TIME MANAGEMENT IN THE TRAINING OF AN INTERPRETER

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Abstract

Interpretation, involves a spontaneous oral transposition of information from one language to another. This spontaneous delivery cannot be effected if the interpreter is unable to understand the language "by ear" (being able to grasp a sequence of truncated sounds and being able to auditory recognize and reconstruct words upon a single hearing). The interpreter is constantly drawing on his intuitive knowledge to fill in the gap). This task is hard to achieve because of time constraint. The inability to fill these gaps spells big trouble. Consequently, "Time" becomes a scarce commodity, which must be used judiciously to arrive at an acceptable objective. This paper aims at identifying and suggesting ways of managing the limited time available by the speed of the discourse

Key words: Time management, interpreting

Introduction

Time Management is the act or process of planning and exercising conscious control over the amount of time spent on specific activities, especially to increase effectiveness, efficiency or productivity (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). Time management which initially was the language of businessmen has now broadened to other activities even personal activities. On a broad sense, time management is necessary because of the following: (1) Time is limited. (2) Time cannot be stored. (3) Multiple goals are scrambling for the available time. Hence, Translation and interpreting is not left out in this chase for Time management. For time to be managed in any activity in life, time management system must be made available. This system could be techniques, methods or tools which must be put in place to achieve the desired objective. In this work we are interested in managing in interpreting.

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Interpreting

Translation has given birth to twin off springs: **Translation proper,** which refers to the written reformation of a written discourse and **interpreting** referring to the oral reformulation of an oral discourse. The latter is our point of focus in this paper.

In international conferences such as The United Nations General Assembly, the presence of headphones is a clear indication that a major linguistic exercise is taking place. In the business of law court, hospital, local health clinic, churches etc, proceedings cannot be carried out effectively without the presence of an interpreter. Given the importance of this task, it is observed that so little has been penned down as to what actually happens during the process of interpreting.

One of the interpreting procedures known as consecutive interpreting is as old as Babel. Here, the interpreter listens to the orator for an upward of 15 to 30 minutes, then renders his speech in short burst or at the very end of the discourse (Crystal 349). This implies that the interpreter waits until a complete statement has been spoken and then begins interpreting. Hence, in consecutive interpreting, only one person is speaking at a time. This approach is widely practiced to interpret testimonies, a situation in which everyone in the courtroom needs to hear the interpretation, in formal situations, committees, and small conferences. It will be difficult to retain in memory such a lengthy message without putting few things down. (Note taking) For a better and faster result, most of the information is retained in the memory as over reliance on note can lead to confusion, stammering and hesitation due to inability to decode the voluminous notes, taken by the interpreter. Notes should be taken in the target language. This helps to dissociate the two languages and discourage the interpreter from taking notes on automatic pilot – letting words short circuit his common sense.

In a larger and more formal setting however, this procedure has been replaced by simultaneous interpreting. This procedure can be traced to the increase in international interaction following the Second World War and also due to availability of modern audio logical equipment. In simultaneous interpreting, the interpreter renders his message in segments of meaning a few seconds after the orator's speech.

This "ear-voice span" is usually about 2 to 3 seconds, but can be as much as 10 seconds if the text is complex. The brain has to remember what has just been said, attend to

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what is currently being said and anticipate the construction of what is about to be said. (Glemet in Gervet 168) quoted by (Crystal 350) opines that "as you start a sentence, you are taking a leap in the dark, you are mortgaging your grammatical future; the original sentence may suddenly be turned in such a way that your translation of its end cannot easily be reconciled with your translation of its start". In consecutive, the interpreter can compensate for not having heard a word or part of the word but by inference, from the rest of the speech, the congruity of what follows will clarify the argument and restore the missing word. But it is not so in simultaneous interpreting. This procedure works under a less forgiven condition:

a. The interpreter must immediately say what he has understood. And the space he can allow himself for reflection never exceeds a couple of seconds.

b. The interpreter speaks almost at the same time with the speaker. In doing so, he creates sounds, which might impair his auditory reception.

c. Most times, the interpreter does not hear the speech directly in the normal speech manner of oral communication, but through equipments which do not transmit the totality of the sound.

Simultaneous interpreting is not a natural system of communication – (Selescovitch 106). In no other context of human communication is any person routinely required to listen and speak at the same time. Yet the interpreter must handle it in a way that leads to natural discourse. There exist other forms of interpreting such as Relay Interpreting, Whispers or Chuchotement etc. Each of these methods could be practiced using any of the above-mentioned procedures.

Interpreting process

(Seleskovitch and Lederer 22) identified three steps into the interpretation process.

a. Merging elements of linguistic meaning with extra-linguistic knowledge to obtain sense.

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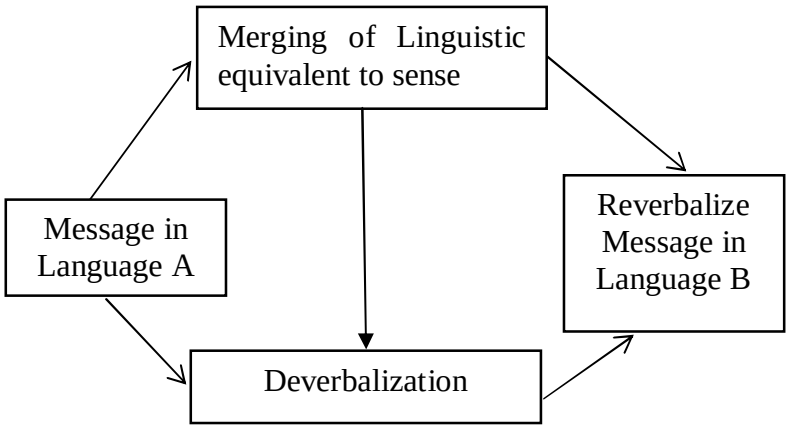
b. Deverbalizing that sense as it emerges.

c. Spontaneously expressing this sense.

By this process, an orator or a speaker before rendering his speech must have consciously or unconsciously assembled and organized ideas, which he calls message or information. This message is then encoded in the expressive form of his language (source language). The encoded is decoded by the interpreter through the process of merging elements of linguistic meaning with extra-linguistic knowledge to obtain sense. The sense obtained is not regurgitated as it is to the audience. The interpreter quickly deverbalizes it, throwing away the linguistic form of the source language, leaving only a bare consciousness form, which the interpreter can then, spontaneously express in the target language.

The interpreting process can be schematized thus:



It takes a space of two to ten seconds for these processes to take place.

The merging of linguistic equivalent to sense and the deverbalization take place at the same time. Invariably, the ear and voice span is very small. How it is done at all is a source of wonder, given the limited time gap. For an interpreter to be effective and efficient in this noble profession he has to make judicious use of the little time available and any activity geared at reducing time is not welcome. Hence, he should be able to identify time killers.

Time killers in interpreting

As we have earlier discovered any activity capable of reducing our time is not acceptable. Thus, the need to identify some of these time killers is of great importance to

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this work. In the course of our study, we discovered that most of these time killers appear insignificant that they are ignored or neglected by most interpreters (students and new entrants in the profession). The Bible describes them as little foxes that destroy the vine. Indeed, these ignorable factors can cause great harm in interpretation. They can mar the carriage of an interpreter.

The use of exact linguistic equivalent. In the target language has been identified as a time killer. This style can be achieved in translation proper because, the translator has the time to sit down, consult books, dictionary and also analyze his work. This liberty is not enjoyed by the interpreter. By international standard, if an interpreter resolves to use linguistic equivalents, he is no longer interpreting but transcoding. Transcoding refers to the kind of translation, which solely reflects the meaning of the words in the respective linguistic codes. Transcoding diverges the interpreter from his target, putting him in a tight corner. In the case of lexical gap, (where there is no equivalent term in the target language for a concept designated) the interpreter will be totally lost. The only solution could be to stammer in the bid to remember the needed term. He could even stop talking. This situation is a great embarrassment to himself, to the orator/speaker and even to the audience. The interpreter's effort to find just the right word is not only a waste of time; it will make him to forget how he began the sentence. The time wasted in searching for the linguistic equivalent in the target language could be saved by employing the sense strategy. The aim of the interpreter is not to copy the linguistic formulation of the original message but to take what is expressed in one language and convey that same reality in the target language. One thing an interpreter must know is that the sense is easily grasped by the memory and that in interpreting, the target language form is not determined by the source language form but by the interpreter's conception of the message. Interpreting takes liberty with the target language (Catford 20, Kelkar 211). The interpreter who tries to remember words will be caught up in the seconds. It is useless and not ethical of an interpreter. To save time, the interpreter should cling to the sense knowledge not the linguistic equivalent.

Appreciating well-constructed phrases, words or information by the interpreter is another time killer. An interpreter should not be affected in any way by the information he is

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sending across. He should detach himself, his philosophy, his "experience" and knowledge from the content of the message. There are two dimensions to interpreting, 'the speaker and the interpreter'. The speaker is an expert in his area of discussion, the idea is not his (the interpreter) and his ideas are not required. He is not the guest speaker but a go-between, an intermediary between the speaker and the audience. Let us consider the following discussion.

Speaker - Today, we are going to talk about "Son ship and blessing actualization".

Interpreter - He interprets the sentence correctly in the target language.

Speaker - You must have been told that, the gifts and blessings of God are without repentance, but today, we will discover that, gifts can be taken away from you.( )

Interpreter - Emm, Umm (looking confused).

He stood speechless for some time. When the information was repeated, he managed to say something. After the message, we found out that he did not relay the message because he did not believe in what was being said and never wanted to feed the audience with what he thought was heresies. Filtering the message is not the duty of the interpreter but that of the audience. That single act put him psychologically and mentally off-balance. It will take him some precious time to put himself on his feet again. That act also informed the audience that he is not fit for the job. A professional interpreter should demonstrate by his work that good and timely interpretation skills are more important to the interpreter than subject expertise.

Another little fox that destroys the vine in interpreting is listening to accent and picking up bad manners. Accent of a language varies from people to people. This variation can be traced to the influence of mother tongue. Thus an interpreter should bear in mind that people don't speak in the same manner and this variation should not distract him from his target. Instead, it should be a point of contact to another source of knowledge. Trying to identify the nationality of the speaker during interpretating kills time and reduces the rate of understanding e.g. a speaker takes the podium and says "Bonjour Mesdames et Messieurs" (Bonju). The interpreter should relay the message immediately. "Good morning

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ladies and gentlemen". On hearing the tone and pronunciation with a noticeable accent, he should not try to identify the nationality of the speaker. The moment he occupies his mind with such, even if it is for a second, the time of decalage (taking off time) will be delayed. As he tries to identify the speaker in his mind, he will not be able to understand and relay the message accurately and on time. There is a limited time gap expected of an interpreter to relay his message. If this is not done at the expected time, it might lead to overlapping of speech, thereby making the whole situation noisy. Listening to accent as well as picking up the speaker's bad habits are agents of distraction. They are capable of diverting the attention of the interpreter, thus reducing the rate of understanding of the interpreter. Seleskovitch et (Lederer 223) opine that an audience intent on understanding what the speaker is saying immediately perceives only one sense. Consequently, in a situation where the interpreter chooses to listen to accents, he will not immediately catch up the sense of the message. No sense no interpreting.

Concentrating properly to understand does not mean adopting a certain posture such as frowning and straining with clenched fist. He or she should avoid such because it also has the ability to delay the decalage of the interpreter. A delay in the decalage leads to overlapping of speech and time wasting. Hence activities geared at saving time should be encouraged.

Time booters

In addition to the constant variables in interpreting: good knowledge of the working language, rich terminology bank, experience, constant research and professional training, there are other factors that could help or boost the scarce commodity "time" in the process of interpreting.

An interpreter should acquaint himself with the **theme of the work before him** before taking the booth. This will help him familiarize himself with the terminology and a global knowledge of the theme, especially in technical conferences, e.g. in a conference on HIV control, the interpreter should avail himself with information concerning HIV, where it was first discovered, the causes, the possible symptoms etc. This information will quicken the rate at which the message is understood no matter how twisted the orator may present the topic. Understanding the sense takes both knowledge of the language and

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knowledge of the subject under discussion. He may not be a specialist but he has to have some knowledge of every field he interprets. This will help him get familiar with the terminology of the area under discussion. This does not mean he has to know every single word and expression in his working languages to be a good interpreter. Words per se do not constitute ideas. They are merely the vehicles used to convey them. Beyond the words, the interpreter must understand the concepts behind them. Knowing the technical terms in a technical subject is not enough. Some knowledge of the theme is required to understand what is said. Once the right preparation is done, (preparing the topic and preparing the terminology) interpreting a technical speech is no different from interpreting general speeches.

E.g.

As we look forward to the Conference in Nairobi, we should do well to consider the United Nations Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975 and in Copenhagen 1980.

Interpretation I:

Dans la perspective de la conférence de Nairobi, nous ferons bien de prendre en considération la conférence des Nations Unies sur les droits des femmes à Mexico en 1975 et à Copenhagen en 1980

A close look at this interpretation reveals that there was no preparation as regards the theme of the conference. The interpreter did not put into play his cognitive knowledge- what he knows about the conference.

Interpretation II:

A la veille de la conférence de Nairobi. Il faut se rappeler Ce qui's'est passé aux conférences de Mexico en 1975 et de Copenhagen en 1980.

This version is ostensibly incomplete but it carries or conveys more information than the first. This is so because there was a good preparation of the theme of the conference. The expressions **Dans la perspective** and **prendre en consideration les conférences** was no well interpreted since there was preparation to depart for another conference, naturally, a French man will say "*a la veile"*. Secondly, the expression "predre en considération" may be misunderstood by the audience. This might be interpreted by the

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audience as a positive recommendation while in actual sense it is sounding a note of warning. An interpretation built on all that has been said previously will be more accurate and more faithful to what the speaker means to convey than one constructed sentence by sentence on the basis of the words the speaker uses (Seleskovith et Lederer 128). To increase the rate of understanding for effective interpreting, an interpreter has to be a jack-of-all-trades. He must be interested in any subject, which comes along – even if only fleetingly. With this kind of preparation, the ideas he will be hearing when listening to speeches will fall on fertile, carefully prepared ground that will spark faster understanding for spontaneous delivery.

A pre-knowledge of the speaker's identity is a time booster. This identity includes his philosophy, his area of specialization, his religion, the political party to which he belongs, his nationality etc. All these factors have a way of influencing an individual actions and speeches. His illustration will also be drawn from what he knows and what he likes doing best, because one cannot live out of his environment. A pastor will always make references to the Bible, even when he is not speaking on religious matters. A mathematician will make references to mathematical theories to buttress his arguments. Knowledge of where he comes from will help to envisage and solve problems of accents, intonation or pronunciation, thus eschewing the problems of speaker's identification in the booth. The interpreter in the booth will immediately cue in with the message because influencing variables capable of distraction have been taken care of.

An interpreter cannot be effective and efficient in his profession if, he ignores or has a poor knowledge of the General World Culture. A narrow exposure of the people's way of life can lead to serious mistakes and difficulty in extracting the message from the source language, especially in the cases of proverbs and idioms. He should know the general world-view of the people whose languages are his working languages.

Clarity of expression comes from understanding the logic of the original. With the advent of simultaneous interpreting, a basic disagreement divided two groups of thought: those who felt that it was important to work into one's foreign language and those who favored interpreting into one's mother tongue. We belong to those who favor interpreting in one's mother tongue. It is possible to understand another language as well as the native speaker. Similarly, we understand much more in the foreign language than we can express.

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Thus our rate of understanding of the foreign language is enough to grasp the message thereafter, spontaneously or naturally express the information in one's native language. It also relieves the interpreter from the conscious act of searching for idiomatic expressions in the foreign language. Working into one's native language yields natural – sounding language, which the native speaker can follow easily. It also increases the rate of attention of the audience.

CONCLUSION

Concentration is the bedrock of good and timely interpreting. For each interpretation to be coherent each segment of understanding must connect with what came before and what comes after. This can only be achieved via high level of concentration on the part of the interpreter. (All other variables remaining constant) Taking into cognizance the time wasters discussed in this work, the interpreter must not allow his attention to wander even for a second. He should not react even to some provocation – noise in the room, movement of fellow interpreters in the audience exchanging a few words (perhaps criticizing his interpretation) or bursting in the booth. His concentration should be at a level where it cannot be broken by external stimulus. Hence he should be able to understand the language by "ear" (Seleskovitch et Lederer 1989). For one to acquire such competence there must be some kind of professional training.

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