

## Retention in Consecutive Interpretation

التخزين في الترجمة المتتالية

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Received date: 07/09/2021

Revised date: 20/12/2021

Publication date: 31/12/2021

### Abstract:

This paper tries to shed some light on the question of retention in consecutive interpretation. It aims at highlighting the difficulty faced by students and trainee interpreters in terms of retaining or memorizing the received message to render it adequately in the target language, and to put forward some strategies and techniques that enhance their short-term memory (STM) retention abilities for better achievement. Researchers affirmed the primordial role of STM during the reception of the oral message and the note –taking process, which rendered it necessary to train and enhance the STM aptitudes for better understanding of the message leading to adequate performance. Interpreting professionals do recommend different activities and techniques in memory training, such as: Retelling, Shadowing exercises, Mnemonics, and exercises with interference. Note-taking is an important skill to master in consecutive interpreting, trainee interpreters should take into consideration: what to note, how to note, and when to note.

**Keywords:** Consecutive Interpretation; Retention; Short-term memory; Note-taking; Memorisation.

### ملخص:

تحاول هذه الورقة تسليط الضوء على مسألة تخزين المعلومة في الترجمة المتتالية. يهدف إلى إبراز الصعوبة التي يواجهها الطلاب والمترجمون المدربون من حيث تخزين الرسالة المستقبلية أو حفظها لاسترجاعها بشكل مناسب في اللغة المستهدفة، واقتراح استراتيجيات وتقنيات التي تعزز قدراتهم على التخزين في الذاكرة قصيرة المدى لإنجاز أفضل. أكد الباحثون على الدور الأساسي للذاكرة قصيرة المدى أثناء تلقي الرسالة الشفوية وعملية تدوين الملاحظات، مما يجعل من الضروري تدريب قدرات الذاكرة قصيرة المدى وتعزيزها من أجل فهم أفضل للرسالة بغية أدائها بشكل مناسب. يوصي المتخصصون في

الترجمة الشفوية بأنشطة وتقنيات مختلفة لتدريب الذاكرة، مثل: التكرار، وتمارين الملاحظة، وتمارين الاستذكار، وتمارين التداخل اللغوي. يعدّ تدوين الملاحظات مهارة مهمة ينبغي إتقانها والتحكم فيها في الترجمة التتابعية، وعلى المترجمين الفوريين المتدربين أن يأخذوا بعين الاعتبار: ما يجب تدوينه، وكيفية تدوينه، ومتى يجب تدوينه.

**الكلمات المفاتيح:** ترجمة تتابعية؛ تخزين؛ ذاكرة قصيرة المدى؛ تدوين الملاحظات؛ حفظ.

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## 1- Introduction

Interpretation is a particular type of translation which requires highly complicated skills. It depends on memory abilities, listening and speaking faculties, in addition to different levels of concentration. At the current state of international interdependence and the global necessity for an effective and immediate intercommunication between the different parties all over the world; interpretation, in all its forms, has become an urgent need to guarantee intercultural and multilingual interaction. The difficulty of practicing interpretation reflects another difficulty in teaching it imposing more requisites on the part of teachers and trainers in the schools and institutes of translation and interpretation. The pedagogy of interpretation involves a variety of strategies which aim at enhancing the different skills the interpreter ought to possess in order to make their performance possible and appropriate.

The main difficulty the students face in the course of their interpretation tasks lies in the problem of retaining or memorizing as much information as possible. Their main worry is how to train the memory on retaining the message (or at least the essence of the message) delivered by the speaker to render it to the receptive audience simultaneously or consecutively. As the students manifest an actual worry about memorizing the different elements of the message heard, they try continuously and persistently to adopt and apply any strategies or techniques that help and guide them to train and enhance the aptitude of their memory. In this regard, this paper tries to shed some light on the question of retention while interpreting; it intends to focus particularly on the problem of retention in consecutive interpretation. The scope of this study is limited to the

pedagogy of interpretation in terms of the techniques, activities and exercises that help students enhance their retention abilities to achieve better performance.

## **2) Modes of Interpretation**

The modes of interpretation have evolved through time among which three are now recognised by the interpreting profession: sight translation, consecutive and simultaneous interpretation. Each mode fits particular needs and circumstances in a particular domain.

### **2.1) Sight Translation**

Sight translation refers to the rendering of material written in one language into a spoken message in another language. It is a true and accurate verbal translation of written material into the spoken form, as such, the different parties can understand documents written in foreign languages. Sight translation is used in a variety of circumstances and events, as in the court when the defendant needs a sight translation for some documents written in a foreign language such as rights forms, plea forms, and probation orders. It is also used when foreign-language documents such as birth certificates, personal letters and identity documents are presented in court (Erickson, 2006, P. 2). Also in medical areas, when we need an oral translation of some medical prospectus.

As sight translation is based on written documents to render orally into the target language, the interpreter is required to master reading comprehension techniques. According to Erickson (2006), an accurate interpretation in sight translation requires interpreters' ability to:

- scan a document rapidly for content and style,
- analyse units of meaning which form each sentence,
- anticipate syntactic rearrangement necessary in the target language,
- render sight translation in the target language while reading ahead and preparing to render next units of meaning,
- render sight translation with accuracy and fidelity to the text,

- employ effective speech skills in terms of clear diction, appropriate pauses and intensity, in addition to fluency.

Interpreters may face many problems and difficulties while performing sight translation such as:

- the difficulty of deciphering handwritten texts, especially when it is a bad handwriting.

- ungrammatical sentence structures and poor punctuation, such as the case of a text written by non-native speakers who are unfamiliar with the rules of grammar and punctuation.

- incoherent or poor thought organisation.

- the difficulty of texts including graphs, tables, pictures or diagrams.

- lengthy or considerably difficult and complex documents.

(National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators, 2006)

## **2.2) Consecutive Interpretation**

The interpreter receives an oral message to interpret into an oral speech. Usually, in consecutive interpretation, the interpreter is alongside the speaker listening and taking notes as the speech progresses. The interpreter makes sure the speaker has finished to render the received message into the target language. He starts interpreting when the speaker takes a pause (the speech may be divided into sections). Once the speaker stops, or comes to a pause, the interpreter interprets (consecutively) the message in the target language in its entirety. Erickson (2006, p.1)

Consecutive interpretation is used in a variety of contexts such as in legal settings when participants are playing an active role, when they must speak or respond, during examinations or cross-examinations and other proceedings. Consecutive interpretation is often used when parties are addressing a witness or defendant on the witness stand such as: attorney/client or prosecutor /witness/ victim interviews, the consecutive mode is the preferred one as it is in a question/ answer session. This type should also be used during police interviews of suspects or witnesses or

victims, especially during recorded interviews. The gaps in speech between the parties allow for a clear and accurate transcript to be prepared if necessary for further court proceedings. Erickson (2006, pp.1-2)

The interpreter is supposed to follow and apply some guidelines for proper interpretation. They should listen intently to whatever party is speaking, be prepared to take notes to aid in recollections, and accurately interpret after the party has completed its statement (Erickson, Ibid, p.2).

There are many activities to perform in order to improve and develop one's competence in consecutive interpretation. For many interpreters, note-taking is extremely beneficial in helping to memorize the different elements of the speech delivered, according to publications of the Judicial Council of California (2001), it is important to develop an efficient note-taking system in order to remember relevant names, dates, places and figures. It is often essential to develop this skill under the direction of an experienced interpreter or teacher. However, the skill one develops will be their own personal method of note-taking. Notes might be recorded in the form of simple outlines, charges, diagrams, or graphs.

An effective note-taking system allows interpreters to concentrate on the ideas and concepts contained in the message not on taking the notes.

### **2.3) Simultaneous Interpretation**

Simultaneous interpreting is often referred to as “listening and speaking concurrently” or “holding the spoken message while simultaneously formulating and articulating the translated message.” Judicial Council of California (2001). The interpreter sits in a sound-proof booth, usually with a clear view of the speaker, at a microphone, listening through headphones to the incoming message in the source language. The speaker delivers his speech in a reasonable pace that permits the interpreter to reformulate the message into the target language. Using his microphone, the interpreter relays then the message into the target language to the audience listening through headphones.

Simultaneous Interpretation is used in a variety of situations, such as in conferences or courts. There are special types of simultaneous interpretation without equipment such as whisper interpretation wherein the interpreter relays a speech between two or more people. Also, escort interpretation wherein an interpreter accompanies a person or a delegation on a tour, a visit or to a meeting or interview. An interpreter performing this role is called an escort interpreter, and these types of interpretation are “liaison interpreting”. (Judicial Council of California, 2001)

There are some requirements for proper simultaneous interpretation, interpreters must do several things at once: to listen intently to whatever party is speaking and to interpret accurately from the source language into the target language. Mizuno (2005, p.2) claims that this type of interpretation is highly demanding as it requires information retention, retrieval, production, and monitoring almost simultaneously. Memorization is very important to undertake simultaneous interpretation, that’s why students and future interpreters need to train with different activities in order to enhance their abilities at this level.

### **3) Training and Enhancing Memorisation in Consecutive Interpretation**

The main difficulty trainees of consecutive interpretation complain about is how to remember the different parts of the message delivered by the speaker! And the problem is even worse when they need to remember details such as names, numbers, date...They often miss out these details! And they keep searching and asking how to render their memory apt to retain as much information as possible. This is the problem of retention: how much information to retain in your memory?

In order to solve such a problem many scholars have studied the different processes involved in consecutive interpretation; they have elaborated models to account for the efforts exerted in this mode (each effort is designed as a phase) and to highlight the role of memory in particular.

### **3.1) The Effort Model of Daniel Gile**

Gile(1999) pinpointed the difficulties and efforts involved in consecutive interpretation, and as a result of his analysis of these efforts, he proposed the model he called “the effort model”. This model is composed of two phases: the first one is the listening and reformulation phase wherein the interpreter listens and analyses the source language speech, and the short-term memory is required between the time information is heard and the time it is written down in the notes (during the note-taking process). In the second phase, interpreters retrieve messages from their short-term memory and reconstruct the speech, read the notes and produce the target language speech. He represented these two phases in the following scheme:

- Phase one:  $I=L+M+N$  (listening+memorisation+note-taking)
- Phase two:  $I=Rem+Read+P$  (retrieval from memory+Reading the notes+production) ( Gile, 1999)

From these two phases it is clear that Gile emphasises the role of memorisation as a basic effort to fulfil the task of consecutive interpretation. In the first phase memory permits the interpreter to concentrate with the speaker to encode the message whereas in the second phase memory enables them to decode the message interpreted in the target language.

We note that Gile (1999) identifies the memory involved in the two phases as short-term memory taking into consideration the processing capacity of the interpreter. It is the type of memory which retains information for a short time. So, we can say that interpreters require short-term memory to retain the message heard before noting it down, and then they organise those notes by interaction with one’s memory’s retrieval capacities, this allows for a better reformulation of the notes into an appropriate message in the target language.

It is worth mentioning that the role of short-term memory depends on the duration of the message delivered by the speaker in consecutive interpreting; in case it is a short message the role of that memory is very

important, and this is why Gile recognises the role of STM in both encoding and decoding phases.

### **3.2) The Research of Danica Seleskovitch**

Seleskovitch (2001) reported in her book “Interpréter pour traduire” a research she carried out on consecutive Interpretation, wherein she distinguished between two types of memory: one retains for a brief moment corresponding to the human capacity of retaining 7 to 8 bits of information for few seconds, and another retains for longer. She called the former “*mémoire verbale ou mémoire auditive, mémoire immédiate, mémoire opérationnelle, or working memory*”. (Seleskovitch, 2001) The latter, however, retains the result of the cognitive integration of this information for a longer period, Seleskovitch(2001) clarifies this type saying: “on retient beaucoup plus longtemps (quelques heures, quelques semaines) le contenu d’une conversation que les mots qui l’exprimaient et qui disparaissent intégralement.” She admits that both types have a role in consecutive interpretation.

In another book entitled “*Pédagogie Raisonnée de l’Interprétation*” , Seleskovitch(2002) presented another classification considering memory as an aptitude (*une faculté*) and subdivided it into chronological steps as follows: “*la mémoire immédiate*” , “*la mémoire à court terme*”, and “*la mémoire à long terme*”; she identified the second type as the working memory. The researcher explained the role of each step considering that ‘*la mémoire immédiate*’ retains a short fragment of a series of sounds for a short time while the second type retains memories (*souvenirs*) of events, actions or arguments as long as the interpreter needs them. The third type retains the knowledge and experiences acquired along life.

If we are to compare these two investigations (of Gile and Seleskovitch respectively), we may affirm that their results are identical: Seleskovitch calls the working memory what Gile calls short-term memory. Perhaps the slight difference lies in the role of ‘*la mémoire immédiate*’ stated in the research of Seleskovitch.



These researches shed light on the significance of memory in interpretation and the necessity to enhance and consolidate memory skills to trainee interpreters.

### **3.3) The Role of Short-Term Memory in Consecutive Interpretation**

The human memory has been subject to intensive scientific studies and investigations; researchers distinguished between Short-Term Memory (STM) and Long-Term Memory (LTM). The short-term memory refers to the state of retaining information for a short period of time without deliberate efforts or mechanisms for later recall. Long-Term Memory occurs when you have made a deliberate attempt to store ideas and information which can then be recalled weeks, months, or even years later; it is essentially responsible for the interpreter's acquisition of knowledge (Zhong, 2003).

A good short-term memory is important in interpretation; it permits to retain the message heard and corresponds to the ability to concentrate. Short -term memory is characterized with its limited and small storage capacity, the interpreter is able to store about nine items of information in this memory as a result of listening attentively to the speaker. The duration of STM is very short, it is up to 30 seconds; some researchers estimated it to be for 6 to 12 seconds (Zhong, 2003).

The time of encoding information in consecutive interpretation depends on the speaker's segments, if we consider the question-answer pattern in different settings, the type of utterances used, then, is more or less short and the interpreter has few minutes for encoding to start after to retrieve information and decode it into the target language (Zhong, Ibid).

Memorisation in interpretation only lasts for a short time. Once the interpretation task is over, the interpreter moves on to another one often in different contexts and circumstances. Therefore the memory skills which need to be enhanced and taught to trainee interpreters are STM skills, and this consolidates the results of Gile's research who insisted that Short-Term Memory has a role in both phases in consecutive interpretation, when the segments of speech uttered by the speaker are relatively short, in encoding

the heard message and decoding the interpretation relying on note-taking skill to boost the memorization abilities.

#### **4) Memory training in consecutive interpretation**

The purpose of short- term memory (STM) training in consecutive interpretation is to enable interpreters understand and retain as much information as possible while listening to the source language message, leading to acceptable interpretation. Therefore, memory training is to be provided at the early stages of interpreters' training, and the techniques and exercises devised should target this purpose.

We will review in what follows the main activities, techniques and tools adopted in memory training for consecutive interpreters. Interpreting experts and professionals do recommend the following classroom activities:

4.1) Retelling in the Source Language: the instructor either reads or plays a recording of a text of about 200 words for the trainees to retell (repeat) in the same language. The trainees should not be allowed to take any notes, they should be encouraged, at the beginning, to repeat the text in the same words of the original as much as they can (Zhong, 2003).

After a certain time of training on retelling with a variety of texts, Zhong (2003) proposes the following tactics should be practiced by the trainees:

- a- Categorization: ask students to group items of the same properties in the text.
- b- Generalization: ask students to draw general conclusions from particular examples or passages from the text.
- c- Comparison: try activities that make students notice the differences and similarities between different things, facts and events in the text.
- d- Description: make students involved in activities of description of a scene, a shape, or size of an object... etc, in accordance with the text devised.

Trainees are encouraged to practice all these technics of description, summarizing, and abstracting the original text in their own words as much as possible after being familiarized with retelling.

The instructor may also recite a series of 7 to 8 unrelated numbers and ask students to repeat the series, once trainees are able to repeat it accurately they are asked to repeat the series backwards (Hellal,1982) .

Another exercise that aims at reinforcing retention in short-term memory is that the instructor reads a story of about 200 words and the trainees are asked to listen to the story and simultaneously to count down in a series of numbers from 1 to100. Once the story is over the trainees are asked to summarise the story, the instructor checks whether trainees are able to concentrate with the story and fulfill the counting. They keep training with such exercises till they achieve better results (Hellal, 1982).

Zhong (2003) suggests other effective techniques in memory training such as:

4.2) Shadowing Exercise: it is a type of activity in which trainees are asked to repeat word-for-word, in the same language, a message presented through a headphone. This kind of exercise is particularly devised for simultaneous interpreting trainees, where they are required to repeat a message heard, either a sentence- by-sentence, or two-by-two sentences or more or less, using the same words.

4.3) Mnemonics: a mnemonic is a device, such as a formula or rhyme, used as an aid for remembering information and make it easier for later recall. A very simple example of a mnemonic is the '30 days hath September' rhyme. By encoding information and numbers in sophisticated, striking images which flow into other strong images, we can accurately and reliably encode information to be easily recalled later (Zhong, 2003).

4.4) Exercises with Interference: It is advisable that exercises with interference (e.g. noise) be provided in order to prevent information loss in the short-term memory. Actually, the environment and other information present in the storage may reduce the information encoded, so recording

speeches with especially 'inserted' noise as a background may be recommended as an effective classroom practice method to enable the students to concentrate and thus strengthen their STM duration (Hellal,1982).

### **5) Note-Taking, an Important Skill to Master**

Note-taking is part of the whole process of consecutive interpreting, including understanding, analysis and re-expression, and if one or more of these activities is missed, whatever notes the interpreter takes would be of little use. This technique has been proved to be very useful for the interpreter working consecutively. The notes improve concentration and prevent distraction, they facilitate the speech reception and analysis helping the interpreter relieve the memory from the pressure of information retention because one characteristic of short-term memory is its limited storage capacity.

Noting down specific details and data such as proper names, numbers, figures, or specialized terms liberate the interpreter from bearing the whole thing in mind. Obviously, the skill of note-taking is very helpful to interpreters, the content and structure of a speech are turned into notes, and the notes in turn are used as a means to help in producing the speech in the target language. However, the process of note-taking is not a simple one as it needs a lot of practice. Gile (1999) foresees a bad effect of note-taking for non-trained interpreters and presents the following reasons:

- a) A high processing capacity is required for deciding what and how to note, as well as for controlling the operation of note-taking.
- b) It is well-agreed upon that writing down things lasts longer than producing them in speech.

In fact, interpreters are required to have particular training in note-taking to get over such obstacles and make this technique an effective aid in consecutive interpretation. Interpreters should take into consideration: what to note, how to note, and when to note (Hanh, 2006).

### **5.1) What to note**

It is crucial for an interpreter to have the ability to identify, select and retain important ideas and omit anything which is not relevant to the understanding of the original speech. It is also important to note down the links between them since the relations between individual ideas influence the overall meaning of the text. The ways in which ideas may be linked together are:

- the logical consequence expressed with words such as consequently, as a result, accordingly;
- the logical cause which can be recognized with the words because, as, or since;
- opposition which often goes with but, yet, however or nevertheless. (Jones, 2002, pp.28-29)

According to Jones (Ibid, p.42), it is also important to note down the modes and tenses of verbs as they bear decisive influence on the meaning of a sentence.

### **5.2) How to Note**

Obviously, notes that are clearly separated and logically organized help the interpreter avoid all confusion when reading back notes. Moreover, notes using abbreviations and symbols are very helpful in activating the most information with the least effort (Hanh, 2006).

#### **a) Abbreviations**

They are used as an aid in taking notes quickly; to abbreviate a word use the shortest form which will be meaningful when you read back. An abbreviation is useless if you don't understand it immediately. According to Hanh (2006), there are many principles and rules for the use of abbreviations; he proposed the following ways for creating abbreviations based on the truth that "the fewer strokes are written, the more time can be saved":

- Write what is heard: the interpreter can write a word by recording its sound only. For example; high- hi, know- no, night- nite... etc.
- Let out medial vowels: for example; build- bld, legal- lgl, bulletin- bltn, save- sv, budget- bjt, should-shld, peace-pce, security-sty... etc.
- Write initial and final vowels: for example; office- ofs, year-yr, follow-flo, value- vlu, open- opn... etc
- to abbreviate phrases, usually from Latin origin, such as:  
for example→ e.g.; take note of→N.B.; that's to say→i.e.;... etc.

Abbreviations of common international organizations should be remembered by the interpreter who must have some background knowledge about it. The following are some common names in abbreviations:

WB (World Bank), EU (European Union), WTO (World Trade Organization), WHO (World Health Organization), IMF (International Monetary Fund), UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization).

#### b) Symbols

A symbol is something such as an object, picture, written word, sound, or particular mark that represents something else by association, resemblance, or convention. Symbols are quicker and easier to write than words, they need to be prepared in advance. According to Hanh (2006), one basic rule for the interpreter is only use the symbols which are already stuck in the mind, any symbol improvised in the middle of interpretation could drive the interpreter into a difficult and intense situation. Some common symbols are: <, >, +, ≠, ×, %,...

(+)→ bon, excellent; (-)→ mauvais, bad; [ok]→approbation; [?]→problem

### **5.3) When to Note**

Interpreters should start the notes as soon as possible without having to wait for a complete "unit of meaning". Therefore, when the interpreter

can sense the meaning of a sentence which might have not been completed, he or she should note it down. Here the interpreter has the ability to “forecast” or predict upcoming segments. It is also worth-mentioning that as soon as speakers finish their utterance(s), the interpreter should stop taking notes instantly and start reproducing ideas. The interpreter is expected to react immediately after the speaker has finished (Hanh, 2006).

### **6) Self-Training in Consecutive Interpretation**

After students practice the different techniques recommended previously, and which are devised mainly to enhance the retention aptitude of their STM memory; the students taking a course in consecutive interpretation may then follow certain training on their own by performing some activities and tasks. The trainees may start training with a piece of speech, or to work on the news on TV or radio on their own or with a classmate. They may play the recorder and listen to the speech (or news) sentence by sentence or paragraph by paragraph; then, they start interpreting consecutively. After they are more comfortable with one division, they may pass to work on longer structures. The trainees should not think of the words heard, but to concentrate on the concepts they convey. And for the items liable to be forgotten such as names, numbers and dates, trainees may rely on notes. With much practice in such a way, the students become less-dependent on note-taking and more apt to understand and remember the whole message.

### **Conclusion**

This paper tackled the notion of retention in consecutive interpretation wherein the students rely heavily on the aptitude of their memory to realize better performance. It is highlighted that short-term memory (STM) has an important role in retaining the received message, while long-term memory enables interpreters to process and analyze long segments of speech. Researchers affirmed the primordial role of STM during the encoding of the message heard and the decoding of the speech into the target language in consecutive interpretation. This proves the necessity of enhancing the STM memory aptitudes of interpreters to achieve

better understanding of the received message leading to adequate performance. Interpretation experts and professionals do recommend different activities and techniques in memory training, such as: retelling, shadowing exercises, mnemonics, and exercises with interference. Note-taking is an important skill to master in consecutive interpretation, trainee-interpreters should take into consideration: what to note, How to note, and when to note.

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