

EXERCISES FOR TRAINING INTERPRETATION

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3.1 Listen to a colleague make a simple narrative speech while counting backwards aloud. Start counting from a different number for each speech i.e., 357, 173 etc. Afterwards summarize to the others what you heard and remember from the original speech. (Seleskovitch and Lederer 2002:170)

3.2 Read out a word in the source language. One person must give a target language version at the same time as a second word is read out. The target language version of that is given as a third word is read out, etc. To increase the level of difficulty use whole phrases rather than single words. (Szabó 2003:76)

3.3 Read out simple mathematical tasks. Students must solve them and answer while listening to the next task. This can be done monolingually or from a source language into a target language. (Szabó 2003:76 and Kalina 1992:254)

3.4 A similar exercise is to ask a student a question. While they are answering the first question a second is asked, to which the student will answer while a third is asked etc. Initially the question and answer can be in the same language, later in different language.

3.5 A question is asked and students must answer "Yes" or "No" and repeat the question while listening to the next question. For example.....

Ques: *Is consecutive interpreting fun?*

Answer: *No consecutive interpreting is not fun.*

This can be made more difficult by moving up from Yes/No questions to Why? questions requiring a longer more considered response - this is most similar to real simultaneous interpreting. (Kurz 1992:249 and Kalina 1992:254)

The exercises 3.1-3.5 above are arguably more useful than shadowing (see 3.11 below) as not only do you have to speak and listen at the same time but also understand and think. This is therefore more similar to the tasks we complete in the booth.

3.6 a) Play a sentence from a tape, listen, stop the tape, think about how to interpret it, speak the interpretation. Repeat. To increase the level of difficulty....

b) Listen to a sentence, stop the tape, think about how to interpret it, speak the interpretation while listening to the next sentence, stop the tape, think about how to interpret it etc. Little by little the thinking pause can be reduced. (also Van Dam 1989:170 and Nadstoga 1989:112)

At a very early stage these exercise are a good introduction to the art of listening and talking at the same time.

3.7 Interpret a speech silently in your head. Then interpret the same speech aloud.

Speaking and listening at the same time is not easy. Neither is thinking and listening. This exercise is an interim stage in the process.

3.8 Improvisation exercise. While in the booth, improvise a speech of 2 minutes on a

subject volunteered by a colleague.

This exercise trains the split attention of the interpreter since as you improvise you should be thinking ahead to your next sentence/paragraph so that the speech remains fluent.

3.9 A more difficult (and often entertaining) variant of the previous exercise. Do the same as in 3.9 except students outside the booth show cards with keywords on them at short intervals. The person speaking must incorporate the word/idea coherently into the improvised speech.

In addition to training split attention this activity accurately mirrors the lack of control we have on content when in the booth, and trains you to think on your feet.

3.10 Shadow or paraphrase a speech (in the same language) while at the same time writing something completely unrelated on a piece of paper. I.e. Numbers from 1-100 in reverse order. (The Interpreter's edge[2])

3.11 All sight translation is in effect a division of your attention as you read ahead in the text while speaking. See also the exercises in Part VI 5 Anticipation.

Exercise 1

In the beginning, the students are given a text (250-300 words) in their native language and are asked to read the whole text in 20-30 seconds. Then, they are asked general questions about the subject of the text. In the second phase, they are asked more specific questions (such as names, dates, places, etc.) before they are asked to read the text for the second time. This time, they are given 10-15 seconds to find the specific information. Lastly, the students are given enough time to read the text thoroughly. This time, they are asked comprehension questions. The same exercise is repeated with the texts written in L2. The aim of this exercise is to develop reading comprehension and fast reading skills.

Exercise 2

In the following weeks, the instructor chooses texts from various fields and gives only the titles of the texts and asks students to use their passive knowledge on the subject. For example, the instructor asks students what they expect from a text entitled "Painful changeover to Euro". The students produce key words by brainstorming on the subject. In the beginning they may wander from the subject and produce irrelevant keywords. However, as they begin to use their passive knowledge and make logical connections they will come to the point. Then, the instructor randomly chooses keywords from the text and asks students to make logical connections between those keywords and form a bold outline of the text. The aim of this exercise is to enable the students to use their passive knowledge and make logical connections between the facts. Following this exercise, the students are handed out the original text and are asked to check if their outline and assumptions are correct. Then they read the text one more time by using fast reading techniques and mark the unknown words. However, the instructor does not explain those unknown words at this stage.

Exercise 3

The same text used in the previous exercise will be used in this exercise. This time, the students are asked to analyze the text in detail. What is the type of the text? Is it informative? Is it vocative? How is the form of the text? Does it include titles, subtitles, articles, tables, graphs, etc? What is the message of the text? Does the text include technical words, jargon, abbreviations, etc? Are the sentences complex? Those questions will prepare the student for the translation process. The following exercises will enable students to develop their own strategies to deal with language-specific problems.

Exercise 4

One of the problems that perplex students is the presence of unknown words. This problem also slows down the reading speed of students and disables them to deal with other problems they face in sight translation. In fast reading process, when the student encounters an unknown word, or a word that is difficult to pronounce, his/her reading speed will slow down. However, in a slow and meaningful reading process, he/she either will be able to guess the meaning of the unknown word by using contextual clues or will realize that the word is not crucial for understanding the message of the whole text. In some cases, however, the word may be directly related to the message and it may cause problems in translation if the word is omitted or ignored. Bearing this in mind, the lecturer may choose texts that may help students to deal with unknown words. The following strategies can be applied on the sample texts:

- a. To focus on the message of the sentence/paragraph rather than the meaning of the word.

Sample text: "If anyone is asked to *rate* a person, whom he knows sufficiently well, on a number of personality variables, he will tend to be influenced by his general opinion of the person. If he has a *high opinion* of the person he will tend to rate him high on all desirable qualities, and vice versa if he has a *low opinion*. (C.J. Adcock: Fundamentals of Psychology)

- b. To guess the meaning of the word by using contextual clues

Sample text: If you were to place a human brain on a table in front of you, you would notice that it is divided neatly into two halves vertically from front to back: these are the right and left *cerebral hemispheres*. And each hemisphere is further divided into four so-called lobes: the one at the front (the frontal lobe) is responsible for controlling movement and for some aspects of emotions; the *occipital lobe* (at the back) deals with sight, the lobe at the side (the temporal lobe) is an important memory store; and the *parietal lobe* (at the top) has a vital role in comparing and integrating information that flows into the brain through the sensory channels of vision, hearing, smell and touch. (Richard Leakey and Robert Lewin: People of the Lake)

Exercise 5:

Another language-specific problem that may cause problems in the process of sight translation is complex sentence structures. Long, complex and compound sentence

structures generally slow down the reading speed and increase the risk of wrong interpretation. Using "parsing" and "chunking" methods may eliminate this problem.

For this exercise, the students are handed out texts, which are written in complex sentence structures. The students are asked to parse each sentence in order to work out to what grammatical type each word and clause belong. Then, they are asked to determine the smallest semantic units in each sentence. Depending on the sentence structure of the language they are translating into, they restructure their sentences. However, it should be noted that the aim of this exercise is to analyze the sentence structure and to re-formulate it in the target language. The aim is not to use the same grammatical structure but to give the same message in the target language.

Exercise 6:

This exercise will help students to focus on the meaning rather than the structure and the words of a given text. The students are given texts written in their native language and they are asked to "paraphrase" each sentence. They are expected to use their own words to give the same message. They try to re-express each sentence in 2-3 different ways without changing the meaning. They are allowed to make additions and omissions, to break a long sentence into smaller sentences, to combine short sentences and make a longer sentence and to change the sentence structure (e.g. active sentences to passive, passive sentences to active sentences). The only rule is **not to change the meaning**.

Suggestions

The above-mentioned exercises aim at enabling students to produce correct, coherent and fluent translations. However, all those exercises are in-class activities. It is obvious that real-life conditions will be different and sometimes more difficult. Therefore, the students should be prepared to solve various problems before they work in real-world conditions. For example:

The text to be sight translated may be handwritten. Hence, in order to familiarize the student with various handwritings, in-class activities should include handwritten texts.

The text to be sight translated may involve ungrammatical sentence structures and poor punctuation. Therefore, texts written by non-native-speakers who are unfamiliar with the rules of grammar and punctuation should also be included in the exercises to make students familiarize with that kind of texts.

The text to be sight translated may be incoherent, or poorly organized. In such a case, the student should be able to detect shortcomings and correct them in the shortest time.

The text to be sight translated may involve graphs, tables, pictures or diagrams. The students should be able to read and interpret those visual-aided texts.

In order to expose the students to different styles of writing and document structures, texts of considerable difficulty and complexity should be chosen. Though text types and topics may vary according to market demand, a sight translation course syllabus design should include the following text types: Commercial and economic texts, e.g. real-world

texts on current world economic and financial issues, international trade and business, scientific and technical texts, e.g. medicine, environment, computer science, journal articles, manuals, patents, political and legal texts.

In conclusion, it should be noted that training time is the time to introduce students to the real-life process of translation. They should be made aware of the fact that there are many factors which may act as constraints on the process. Their role is to make certain decisions in order to maneuver among those factors.