

Note-taking in Consecutive Interpreting: An Essential Aid for Novice Interpreters

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Abstract

This paper is aimed at describing note taking in consecutive interpreting as an effort as well as important aid for novice interpreters. Interpreting occurs when one person transfers message orally that he or she hears into another language. This could be done either simultaneously or consecutively. In consecutive interpreting, the interpreter listens to a speech while taking notes. When the speaker has finished, the interpreter stands up and delivers the speech in his/her native language. Note taking becomes the core of the process of rendering message from source language into target language and beneficial to assist interpreters during his/her performance in delivering the message. Several symbols and codes are then used by interpreters. One interpreter to another could probably have different symbols for representing the same item. Conventionally, several symbols are applied by interpreters worldwide. They cover abbreviation of linking words, negation, underlining stressing, symbols of expression, number, movement, correspondence and some other. Nevertheless, according to the practical conditions and making the best use of some basic principles concerning note-taking in consecutive interpreting, the beginners can develop good note-taking skills, which can be regarded as his or her own note-taking system.

Keywords: note taking, consecutive interpreting, aids, novice interpreter.

Abstrak

Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan teknik mencatat dalam pengalihbahasaan secara konsekutif sebagai salah satu upaya sekaligus sebagai alat bantu yang sangat penting bagi alihbahasawan pemula. Pengalihbahasaan terjadi ketika seseorang mengalihkan pesan secara lisan atas apa yang ia dengar ke dalam bahasa lain. Hal ini bisa dilakukan secara simultan maupun konsekutif. Dalam pengalihbahasaan konsekutif, alihbahasawan mendengarkan pesan yang disampaikan oleh narasumber sambil mencatat. Pada saat narasumber selesai, ia akan berdiri dan mengalihkan pesan dari bahasa sumber ke bahasa sasaran. Kegiatan mencatat, oleh karena itu, menjadi inti dari proses pengalihan pesan dari bahasa satu ke bahasa kedua dan sangat menguntungkan bagi alihbahasawan selama ia menjalankan tugasnya. Beberapa simbol

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dan kode kemudian dipakai oleh alihbahasawan. Antara satu alihbahasawan dengan alihbahasawan lain sangat memungkinkan terjadi perbedaan dalam hal pemakaian simbol dan kode tersebut. Simbol yang berbeda sangat memungkinkan digunakan untuk merujuk pesan yang sama. Secara umum, simbol-simbol yang sudah dikenal luas di kalangan alihbahasawan sudah digunakan di seluruh dunia. Simbol itu antara lain singkatan *linking words*, negasi, penekanan, simbol ungkapan, angka, gerakan, kesesuaian dan lain sebagainya. Namun demikian, berdasarkan kondisi praktis dan penggunaan beberapa prinsip dasar teknik mencatat dalam pengalihbahasaan konsekutif, para alihbahasawan pemula dapat mengembangkan keterampilan mencatat mereka yang dapat dianggap menjadi sistem mencatat yang mereka ciptakan sendiri.

Kata kunci: mencatat, pengalihbahasaan konsekutif, alat bantu, alihbahasawan pemula.

I. INTRODUCTION

Broadly speaking, interpreting is considered as oral translation. While translation itself deals with written material, interpreting largely concerns about spoken material in rendering message. This area is relatively new and even frequently considered under the heading of translation. However, as it grows, interpreting develops and offers more subtopics to discuss.

Interpreting occurs when one person transfers message orally that he or she hears into another language. This could be done either simultaneously or consecutively. In simultaneous interpreting, the listener hears the interpretation at the same time as the speech is made whereas in consecutive interpreting, the interpreter listens to a speech while taking notes. When the speaker has finished, the interpreter stands up and delivers the speech in his/her native language.

Consecutive interpreting allows an interpreter to take some notes while the speaker is delivering the speech. The length of the speeches varies, but often the interpreter is expected to handle up to six or seven minutes of speech (Gentile, 1996) or it could be as long as fifteen minutes nowadays (Phelan, 2001: 9). This mode of interpreting involves many skills

of interpreting. They include memory, concentration, listening, understanding, subject matter competence and note taking. Among those skills, note-taking is the central position in determining the result of the interpretation itself. Notes then become crucial aid for an interpreter during the process of transferring spoken messages.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In describing the topic of discussion, several relevant theories are applied in this paper as explained in this subchapter as follows.

2.1 Consecutive interpreting

Interpreting has been conducted by people for the sake of communication. For a long time, whenever people met who had no common language, they had to make do with sign language or find someone who could speak both languages. Some people grew up in bilingual environment, because they lived in a border area or because their parents spoke different languages (Phelan, 2001). Exposing two language or more allows people to acquire their second language. This bilingual environment would be beneficial for them to engage in communication with both communities in many ways.

The interpreter is then one who is able to transfer message orally from the speaker into another language. Generally, it can be performed either simultaneously or consecutively. In simultaneous mode, the interpreter makes the audience hear the interpretation at the same time the speech is made. Thus, a very thorough preparation should be made by the interpreter. In contrast, consecutive mode needs to wait for the speaker to finish his/her speech. This mode enables the interpreter to take some notes to help him deliver the exact information.

In consecutive interpreting, on the other hand, it can be obviously seen a clear division of the skills involved in this process. Apart from knowledge of the language, memory, concentration and understanding are

important factors. The importance of delivery is clear when the interpreter has to stand up in front of the audience and gives the speech.

In regard to memory and comprehension in consecutive interpreting, Meifang (2012:178) specifically explained that though memories have their special characteristics in interpreting, the close cooperation of memory and comprehension is more important in interpretation where time limit exerts more pressure on interpreter's information processing flow. In interpreting, memory without comprehension is literal expression with the switch of words while comprehension without memory is subjective, guided by personal bias. Putting much emphasis on memorizing the source-language speech, neglecting the necessity to understand the text first or being unable to understand the content, the interpreter has to do literal interpreting, which is likely to put the audience in a state of puzzlement.

A qualified interpreter has the same memorizing capacity as others, but he distinguishes himself in the memorizing method especially after a quite long time of delivery or numbers and technical terms occur. With the assistance of comprehension beforehand, what he memorizes is meaning rather than the mere words. In other words, comprehension goes before and facilitates memorization.

The reactivation process of long-term memory facilitates comprehension. According to the schema theory, during the information processing stage of interpretation, the content of the source-language speech are fit into the frame of the old scheme to form a new, more concrete schema for better comprehension. In all, schema helps the interpreter perform the tasks of word recognition, sentence and discourse comprehension. As schema is stored in mankind's long-term memory when it is used to understand something, the reactivation of long-term memory is actually underway. Comprehension, in turn, intensifies the effects of short-memory in interpretation. Chunking by meaning, which is actually based on comprehension, increases the capacity of the short-term memory. Therefore, we can conclude that long-term memory,

comprehension, short-term memory are interconnected, projecting 'one after another' effect.

2.2 Note taking in consecutive interpreting

Note taking in this mode of interpreting becomes undoubtedly crucial. While the speakers deliver the speech, commonly an interpreter takes some notes. It is done to avoid interrupting the speaker all the time for fairly long speech.

The purpose of note-taking is to increase memory efficiency, not to take down everything one has said. Only with high memory efficiency can the interpreter ensure accuracy in work (Lu, 2013: 73). As to much note taking an interpreter may reduce rather than increase memory efficiency; it should not be overused. One should realize that the key role of ensuring the accuracy of message transfer lies on the memory rather than note taking. Hence, note taking in consecutive interpreting should only focus on such key information as time, figures, proper names of persons, and places, etc that are mentioned in a speech.

In addition, Zhong (in Lu, 2013: 74) states that the interpreter's notes are especially individual in character. Practicing interpreters develop their own techniques for note taking. Some use a great number of symbols while others hardly use any. One person's note would probably be different from other interpreters. Symbols may vary from one interpreter to another interpreter.

3. METHODOLOGY

This is a descriptive qualitative research since it aims to describe how to take some notes as an important instrument in consecutive interpreting. Several relevant theories are gathered to give a detailed and comprehensive explanation about the significance of taking notes to assist interpreters in rendering the message.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This part describes several principles of note taking in consecutive interpreting. It also provides some considerations to take for novice interpreters.

4.1 Principles in Note Taking

The use of a technique is always dependent upon the application of a certain number of principles. This is what we call the instructions. One need not follow the rules recommended in such instructions. Indeed the product, the device or system for which they were devised may well work even if they are not observed, but will do so less efficiently. The same applies to note taking. Dealing with this, Rozan (in Phelan, 2001) proposes seven principles of note taking in consecutive interpreting as follows.

4.1.1 Noting the idea rather than the word

Whenever taking notes, the interpreter must concentrate on the major idea, the general idea of the given speech and how this can be noted clearly and simply.

4.1.2 Abbreviation

Interpreters need to abbreviate long words by noting the first two and the last two letters only. Alternatively, find a short word by the same meaning. Besides, the interpreters should notice the abbreviated forms are not ambiguous.

4.1.3 Links

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 |

- This thus, in other words, to conclude, in conclusion

4.1.4 Negation

- OK to approve, agree
- ~~OK~~ / no OK to disapprove, disagree

4.1.5 Adding emphasis

- Int interesting
- int very interesting
- ? important question

4.1.6 Verticality

Verticality means taking notes from top to bottom rather than from left to right. This method makes it possible to group ideas logically by allowing a complete and immediate synthesis when we come to read back our notes; to do away with many links which would otherwise be essential to the clarity of the text.

Example:

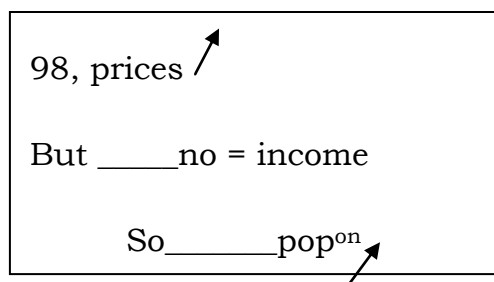
Because the French, German and British governments have cut customs duties, visa fees and administrative charges.

cos	Fra Ger UK cut Duties Visa fees Admin charges
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4.1.7 Shift

Shift and verticality are the fundamental principles underlying this note-taking system. Shift means writing notes in the place on a lower line where they would have appeared had the text on the line above been repeated. For a clearer understanding, consider the following example:

“ over the course of 1998, prices rose, although not to the same extent as income, thus the population’s net income increased.”



Dealing with the symbols, some of Razon’s ideas can be combined with the practice of Indonesian-English interpreting. If applied flexibly, the principles can be of much help to the note-taking of Indonesian speeches. For example, applying his ideas of using symbols to represent some Indonesian expressions commonly used in diplomatic occasions as seen here:

- ∴ therefore
- ∵ because
- :
- to express thought or belief
- “ to express what is said, declared or affirmed
- ≠ unlike, as against
- + moreover, in addition

Obviously, it is impossible to use abbreviation or symbols to represent every term and every word one might encounter in interpreting. This basic principle is worthwhile when they can help the novice interpreter catch the speakers’ words speedily and recall them immediately after the speech. Thus, one should not mechanically memorize those principles, but rather, regard them as a guide to the interpreting practice.

4.1.8 Practical Considerations For Novice Interpreters

For novice interpreters, there are some considerable points to improve their note taking skills.

4.1.8.a Write as few words or symbols as possible

An interpreter should always concentrate on listening (for comprehension and transference). Due to very strict time allotment, the interpreter must practice “economy in words” while taking notes. Make sure that each word or symbol represents “key word”.

4.1.8.b Better take notes in the target language

Taking notes in the target language rather than source language saves time and effort when the time comes to deliver the interpretation. It also helps the interpreter to make a conscious effort to move away from the structures and expressions of the source language. It might be somewhat difficult for novice interpreters. However, they can practice it starting from the short speeches and do some repetition in practice. Accordingly, the more they practice, the better the novice will be.

4.1.8.c Make sure that the notes are logical and legible

As far as possible, the interpreter should be able to make a logical analysis of the speech that is being made and to take notes accordingly. By doing so, the speaker’s flow or sequence of ideas can be better grasped and noted and therefore better interpreted. Furthermore, the notes should be legible in the way that it must be easy to read by the interpreter him/herself.

4.1.8.d Memory is expected to work simultaneously with note-taking

As noted earlier, note-taking is used to supplement memory efficiency. We can trust our notes no more than our memory. Accuracy in interpreting is only possible when we combine the two skills together. The process of note taking should be accompanied by memory. Note taking is not to interfere in memory.

5. CONCLUSION

As discussed previously, note taking in consecutive interpreting is essential for novice interpreters. However, the interpreter's notes are intended only for immediate use and especially individual in character. There is no certain mode for note-taking in consecutive interpreting. Even the same interpreter may take notes of different styles in different interpreting occasions. Nevertheless, according to the practical conditions and making the best use of some basic principles concerning note-taking in consecutive interpreting, the beginners can develop good note-taking skills, which can be regarded as his or her own note-taking system.

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