

Designing an Introduction to a Simultaneous and Consecutive Interpreting Course

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Abstract

The article examines the conditions to be taken into account when designing an introduction to a simultaneous and consecutive interpreting course for third year students in Modern Languages Applied to Economics starting from the assumptions and ending with the solutions proposed by the author. As the course has not started yet, the practical validation of these solutions is yet to be examined in a later article.

Keywords: *course design, modern languages applied to economics, consecutive interpretation, simultaneous interpretation*

Introduction

I have recently been asked to design a course called “Introduction to Simultaneous and Consecutive Interpretation” for the third year students of the programme “Applied Modern Languages in Economics and Business”. This course, which should be delivered during the last semester of their bachelor’s studies, is the first encounter of these students with interpreting. There are 42 hours devoted to this course, out of which 14 are devoted to lectures and 28 to seminars. Each lecture and seminar lasts for two hours. The students study two languages, namely English and French, and are admitted into the programme on the basis of their marks, without any entrance examination. All through their courses they study business and economics, English and French, the number of hours dedicated to French being the smallest of the three. For various reasons, their level of French, both at the beginning and at the end of the bachelor’s studies is lower than their level of English. However, the course should include interpreting in both languages. Considering all these factors, I had

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to make several decisions about the design of the course, which present the subject of this article.

1. Assumptions

These decisions were made based on the following assumptions:

1. Interpreting is a skill, not a science, so more time should be devoted to practice than to theory.
2. Training a good interpreter takes several years, while the time devoted to this activity in the curriculum of applied modern languages in business and economics is only one academic term.
3. The students of this programme are trained to interpret in business and economics. Therefore, the course should focus mainly on situations of communication specific to this field.
4. An interpreter should have at least level C1 in his/her active languages. Or, most of the students of this programme have level B2 in English and level A2-B1 in French.

2. Decisions

Considering the above assumptions, I have made the following decisions for the course:

2.1. Theory vs Practice

1. The 42 hours allowed for the course will be divided into 14 hours of lectures and 28 hours of practice.

If practice is more important than theory, why should theory also be taught? According to Danile Gile:

[...]the main positive effect of theoretical components in a training programme should be sought in their explanatory power and the reassurance it can provide to students [...] From such understanding, training programme participants may expect the following advantages:

-They may be able to advance faster and further, as mentioned above. In particular, by providing them with an appropriate explanatory frame work,

theoretical concepts and models can help them prevent or do away with strategic and tactical errors in translation. [...]

-Theoretical concepts and models can help them choose appropriate strategies and tactics when they are faced with new situations not met during the training programme, by providing them with tools for analysis of possible actions and their probable or possible consequences." (Gile, 2009: 17).

Consequently, the theory taught during the seven lectures of this course is the following:

- **Lecture 1** draws a parallel between interpretation, to which the students are exposed here for the first time, and translation, to which they have been exposed before in both languages taught in the programme. Then it lists the skills and qualities of a good interpreter because the students should be aware of the basic requirements of this activity and work to improve those they do not master. As students in interpretation, they should also be aware of all the types of activities this profession includes as they may have to perform them in the future should they choose to become professional interpreters. Two basic requirements of interpretation are also presented: the interpreter's fidelity and the phases of interpretation. The lecture ends with the working conditions of an interpreter which are a must for good interpretation.

- **Lecture 2** deals with consecutive interpretation, both long and short consecutive and contains a part devoted to note-taking though this activity will not be taught during the course. There are two reasons for excluding long interpretation and, as a consequence, note-taking from the course. The first is that teaching note-taking takes quite a long time which this course doesn't provide. The second is that long consecutive is rarely used in business. Then why deal with note-taking in this chapter? Because students may have to do long consecutive in the future and learning note-taking is easier if they have a basis to start from.

- **Lecture 3** dwells on simultaneous interpretation.

- **Lecture 4** explains the most important difficulties both novice and experienced interpreters are faced with in their professional activity.

- **Lecture 5** is purely theoretical, its purpose being to create a basic professional culture for the students. It presents the Effort Model which explains why interpretation is such a difficult activity.

- **Lecture 6** is, on the contrary, more practical as it lists several tips for novice interpreters.

- **Lecture 7** presents the interpreter's ethics and conduct which both beginners and experienced professionals must follow.

Practice, on the other hand, makes up the most important part of the course. As both consecutive and simultaneous interpreting are difficult activities, students will not be asked to interpret immediately. The hours devoted to practice will include the following activities:

- Exercises meant to develop certain skills which are of the utmost importance for interpreters: rephrasing, improving listening, improving speaking, improving language knowledge, improving memory and split attention, improving anticipation.
- Introductory exercises to consecutive interpreting.
- Consecutive interpreting.
- Introductory exercises to simultaneous interpreting.
- Simultaneous interpreting.

Why start with consecutive interpreting and move then to simultaneous interpreting? First, because consecutive interpreting teaches students some of the skills that will also be needed in simultaneous interpreting, such as rephrasing, listening, speaking, memory and split attention. Second, because consecutive interpreting, namely short consecutive, requires less effort than simultaneous interpreting.

Daniel Gile has developed an "Effort Model" explaining the several types of efforts interpreters are submitted to. By applying his model, I arrived at the following representation of the efforts to which an interpreter is submitted during listening and speech production (where Coordination means coordinating the other efforts so that none of them takes too much of the interpreter's processing capacity):

Interpreting = Listening and Analysis + Remembering + Production +
Coordination

Though the model applies both to short consecutive and simultaneous interpreting, the additional difficulty of the latter lies in the

fact that Listening, Analysis and Production are carried out at the same time, while in short consecutive they are done one after the other.

The lectures take place once every other week, while the practical activities take place every week. Therefore, the first two seminars will include exercises meant to create various skills needed by interpreters, as well as introductory exercises for consecutive interpreting. The following two seminars will consist of consecutive interpreting from English into Romanian. Considering their knowledge of the three languages involved in the course, I think that is less stressing for students to start in this format. In order to reinforce practice in English, the next two seminars are devoted to consecutive interpreting from Romanian into English. They are followed by two seminars of consecutive interpretation from French into Romanian, as by then students will have had some practice in consecutive. Then, there are three seminars which deal with simultaneous interpreting from English into Romanian. The first of these will also include preparatory exercises for simultaneous interpreting, which I believe are better done before starting this practice rather than at the beginning of the course. The reason for starting with English in simultaneous is the same as above. Finally, the course will end with three seminars of simultaneous interpreting from French into Romanian.

2.2. *The Course is an Introduction to Interpreting*

There are several types of interpreting:

Simultaneous interpreting – the interpreter translates the sentence while listening to the next sentence uttered by the speaker.

- *Consecutive interpretation* – the interpreter waits for the speaker to speak and when he/she stops translates what was said. There are two types of consecutive interpreting: the *true or long consecutive* in which the speaker stops after several sentences so that the translator has to take notes while listening to the speech so as not to miss information, and the *short consecutive* in which the speaker stops after each sentence and the interpreter doesn't need and doesn't have time to take notes. True consecutive is generally done in legal translations while short consecutive is done in business negotiations.

- *Whisper interpreting* is a form of simultaneous interpretation in which the interpreter doesn't use a headset and a microphone, but sits next to the person he/she translates for and whispers the translation for him/her.

- *Relay interpreting* is another form of simultaneous interpretation in which the speaker delivers his/her speech in a non-international language which the audience doesn't understand, let's say Mandarin. The team of Mandarin interpretations translates the speech into an international language, generally English, using the headset and the microphone. Instead of listening to the speaker, the other interpreters listen to the relay and translate what he/she says into other languages which are understood by various members of the audience, let's say French and German. Obviously, there is a longer time between the moment the speaker delivers the speech and the French or German speaking audience understands it. In addition, the relay must be a very good interpreter so that what he/she says makes sense for his/her colleagues working in French or German.

- *Sight translation* consists in "reading" a source-language text aloud in the target language. This happens rather rarely in conferences when speakers have received a text they want to have translated orally on the spot.

- *Simultaneous interpretation with text* occurs in conference interpretation when speakers read a text which has been previously given to the interpreters. The interpreter doing the translation has to simultaneously read the text and listen to the speaker as the latter may omit or change parts of the text.

- *On the phone interpreting* is a form of consecutive interpretation in which the interpreter is staying near one of the speakers and translating over the phone for the other one. It is sometimes done in business.

- *Community or social interpreting* is done for communities of ethnic minorities, mostly emigrants, with a view to enable them to access various services such as: medical, educational, housing, social security and legal. Besides being fluent in the language he/she interprets from/to, the community interpreter must know the services he /she is involved with very well and be aware of the cultural and racial implications of his/her work.

- *Sign language interpreting* – the sign language interpreter converts spoken language into the language of signs in order to facilitate understanding between hearing and deaf persons. Besides a good knowledge of the two “languages” and of the subject matter he/she deals with, a sign interpreter must be aware of the deaf culture.

Considering that this course is only an introduction to interpreting and that it covers only a limited number of hours, I decided not to teach all these types of interpreting.

2.3. Choosing What to Teach

Considering that the students for whom this course is designed are enrolled in a programme of applied modern languages in business and economics, I have chosen to teach only the types of interpreting that are more frequent in the situations of communication specific to these fields. These are:

- *Short consecutive interpreting*, which is commonly used in business negotiations. Long consecutive is important for legal and diplomatic translation. As previously mentioned, another reason for this choice lies in the fact that long consecutive requires note-taking and teaching this process is time consuming.

- *Simultaneous interpreting*, which is used in conferences on economics topic and in press conferences delivered by the members of the business community.

2.4. The Languages in Which to Teach

Certain specialists in interpretation recommend that interpreters only translate towards their mother tongue. Unfortunately, Romanian interpreters are forced to translate both into and from their mother tongue as there are very few foreign interpreters who can translate from Romanian.

However, considering the students’ level in English and French and their lack of experience in interpretation, the practical part of the course will include, besides the exercises:

- short consecutive interpretation from English and French into Romanian as well as from Romanian into English. The reasons for this choice are, on the one hand, that the students' knowledge of English is better than their knowledge of French, and, on the other hand, that much more business negotiations requiring consecutive interpreting are carried out in English than in French;

- simultaneous interpretation from English and French into Romanian.

All the other types of interpretation can be taught during a specialized master programme taken only by those students who want to become professional interpreters.

3. Assessment

Though assessment was not mentioned among the assumptions taken into account when designing this course, I feel that is necessary to say a few words about the way in which I decided to assess the students. Beside the pro bono point, assessment will include the following:

- 4 points for the seminar, out of which two for attendance and preparation of the seminars. Attendance is important to practice the skills needed by an interpreter. Preparation is part of the profession of every interpreter and preparing the seminar will teach the students this skill. The other two points will come from an essay written at home whose role is to check understanding of the theoretical notions taught during the lectures. The students will have to answer questions asked at the end of each lecture;

- 5 points for the final exam, which will be oral and test the students capacity to interpret both in consecutive and in simultaneous. Again, considering their level in the two languages, consecutive interpreting will be tested from French into Romanian and simultaneous interpreting from English into Romanian.

Conclusions

This article presents only the first steps in designing an introduction course to simultaneous and consecutive interpreting. This course should be tested in class and adjusted accordingly. So, there must be a follow up to the article presenting the actual results of teaching the course and the possible adjustments it will undergo after being actually taught.

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