

Which language do interpreters use in Consecutive Interpreting?

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Abstract — This paper is based on a study about Consecutive Interpreting notes used by interpreters. In Consecutive Interpreting, note-taking facilitates the interpreter's job in not overloading the interpreters' processing capacity and memory. This paper in particular investigates which language is chosen by the interpreters in note taking, whether the A-language or the B-language as well as the source language or the target language, what are the reasons behind this choice, and if the third language (or C-language) influences the note-taking, by analysing consecutive notes of students in English-Italian and German-Italian language pairs.

Keywords: Consecutive Interpreting; notetaking; language choice; source language; target language; A-language; B-language

I. INTRODUCTION

Consecutive Interpreting has been the subject of many studies and analysis conducted by different authors in the interpreting field (such as Herbert, Rozan, Seleskovitch, Ilg, Gile, Allioni), referring to Consecutive Interpreting as the interpreting form where the interpreter translates small parts of the speech consecutively. While the speaker is talking, the interpreter takes notes, and when the speaker stops, the interpreter translates orally what has been said into the target language. Unlike Simultaneous Interpreting, it occurs only after the speaker has stopped speaking [7] and without headphones and booth. In Consecutive Interpreting, Gile recognises the listening and analysis effort, as consisting of all comprehension-oriented operations, the production effort, which is defined as the output part of interpretation, and the memory effort, where phonetic segments may have to be added up in memory and analyzed. "Each effort has specific processing capacity requirements that depend on the task(s) it is engaged in, namely the particular comprehension, short-term memory, or production operations being performed on speech segments. Due to the high variability of requirements depending on the incoming speech segments, processing capacity requirements of individual efforts can vary rapidly over time" [4].

In order to avoid that interpreters' memory is overloaded, after the First World War the note taking system was invented by the first interpreting pioneers during the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. The ABC of consecutive notetaking is

based on Rozan's 7 principles ad 20 symbols but "this system is not to be followed blindly. It should be the inspiration; it should be adapted according to whatever best suits each individual." [1]

Actually, interpreting students learn the Rozan's system and then develop their own note-taking method, composed of symbols, abbreviations and words in the A-language, B-language, C-language or even a mix of them. A few authors focused on analysing which language dominates in the interpreters' notes and the issue of interpreter's choice of language is in question. "So far, most of the literature has mainly aimed at leaving recommendations about what interpreters' notes should look like or how note-taking should be taught – if at all. However, most of these recommendations are offered on the basis of personal experience and/or opinions only, and often, they point in different directions" [2]. Some authors like Ilg and Gile suggest to use the source language while others (such as Herbert, Rozan and Seleskovitch) suggest to employ the target language, in order to facilitate the production phase. In this paper I would like to focus my attention on the language actually used by interpreters in note-taking.

Only few scholars analysed by means of empirical studies which language dominates in the interpreters' notes. Seleskovitch in 1975, Kirchhoff in 1979 and Andres in 2002 found that interpreters use a mix of source and target language. Van Dam, instead, found that rather than the choice between target and source language, A-language or the source language are the more likely competing parameters in note taking, but the A-language is the generally chosen language over the source language when the two parameters do not coincide [2].

The influence of the third language or C-language was observed by many authors (such as Seleskovitch, Kirchhoff, Andres and Van Dam) and deeply studied by Blaszczyk and Hanusiak in an investigation conducted in 2010 with regard to the Polish/English/Swedish combination. This investigation revealed that language qualities influence the note taking of interpreters because some expressions in the C-language may provide good note-taking solutions, in the event that the words are significantly shorter in the C-language than in the others.

II. METHODOLOGY

The subject of the present investigation is note-taking in consecutive interpreting used as a mnemonic support in order to reduce the cognitive load of an interpreter, whose task is very demanding in terms of listening, analysis and production efforts. The aim of this study is to analyse what language (that is to say A-language or B-language and source language or target language) is chosen by interpreters taking notes while translating in Consecutive Interpreting in the English-Italian and German-Italian language pairs and if any influence of the third or C-language can be observed, according to the results obtained by other authors.

Nine subjects (female) with Italian as A-language, English as B-language and German as C-language took part in the study. Other nine subjects (female) with Italian as A-language, German as B-language and English as C-language were involved in the study. The sample was composed of only interpreting students with the same levels of training and experience, that is to say students in the second year of the First Cycle Degree at IULM University of Milan, who have studied Consecutive Interpreting since one year. All subjects were Italian native speaker.

The German text to be translated into Italian was an economic speech, containing 100 words, held in the occasion of a Multinational Group Convention but read at a standard speed that did not represent a hindrance for the students. The text did not show particular lexical or syntactical difficulty.

The English text to be translated into Italian was a tourist/cultural speech, containing about 100 words, held during the European Commission Conference “Cultural and Religious Routes” at the Fraschini Theater of Pavia but read at a standard speed without relevant hindrances and particular lexical or syntactical difficulties for the students.

The Italian text to be translated into English and German was a cultural speech of the same length as the English and Italian texts, always held during the same European Commission Conference “Cultural and Religious Routes” and read at a standard speed that did not represent a hindrance for the students. This text, on the contrary, presented some syntactical difficulties typical of the Italian sentence structure with subordinate clauses, but without lexical difficulties.

The first group of nine students performed Consecutive Interpretation from English into Italian and from Italian into English, without knowing that the focus of the investigation was the note-taking.

The second group of nine students carried out Consecutive Interpretation from German into Italian of the German text and from German into Italian of the Italian text. They did not know too about the investigation objective.

All consecutive sets of notes were collected after consecutive interpretation and then analysed.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

According to this analysis, notes from English into Italian and from Italian into English as well as from German into Italian and from Italian into German show totally different results, as expected from the previous studies conducted by other authors.

B. Results of notes in the English-Italian language pair

The table below shows the results of the analysis conducted on the notes in the English-Italian language pair. It is possible to observe that from English into Italian, where English is the source language but not the A-language, a mix of both languages can be found in 5 cases out of 9, while only English notes (that is to say the source language or B-language) are observed in 4 out of 9 cases. In this case the A-language is not the exclusively students’ favourite language compared to the source language, considering that the two parameters do not coincide.

From Italian into English mainly Italian notes were present: in just 3 out of 9 cases some English words were observed in the consecutive notes, considering that Italian was both A-language and source language. This result confirms what emerged from the Van Dam’s investigation, which revealed that the subjects “write most of their notes in their A-language and very few in their B-language” [2].

Students	Consecutive Interpreting Notes	
	Notes English > Italian	Notes Italian > English
Student 1	Only English notes	Mainly Italian notes with some English words
Student 2	Only English notes	Only Italian notes
Student 3	Both Italian and English notes	Only Italian notes
Student 4	Only English notes	Mainly Italian notes with some English words
Student 5	Only English notes	Only Italian notes
Student 6	Both Italian and English notes	Mainly Italian notes with some English words
Student 7	Both Italian and English notes	Only Italian notes
Student 8	Both Italian and English notes	Only Italian notes
Student 9	Both Italian and English notes	Only Italian notes

TABLE I. CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETING NOTES IN THE ENGLISH-ITALIAN LANGUAGE PAIR

As expected, in the students’ notes also German words were present (such as the term “gleichzeitig” [at the same time]) but it is very interesting to observe that they were not particularly short to write. German in fact represents their C-language yet it influences the note taking process not only for time saving reasons, as stated by Blaszczyk and Hanusiak.

C. Results of notes in the English-Italian language pair

The table below shows the results of the analysis conducted on the notes in the German-Italian language pair. It is possible to state that from German into Italian, where German is the source language but not the A-language, a mix of both languages can be observed. In 5 cases out of 9 more Italian than German words were written while in 2 out of 9 cases more German than Italian words were recorded. In other 2 cases the notes were only in German (that is to say the source language or B-language) and that is why we can state that the A-language is not the exclusively prevailing language, considering that the two parameters do not coincide.

Without any doubt, in 100% of cases Italian was the only language chosen to take notes from Italian into German, confirming that the favourite language to take note is the A-language when it coincides with the source language.

Students	Consecutive Interpreting Notes	
	Notes German > Italian	Notes Italian > German
Student 1	Mainly Italian notes with some German words	Only Italian notes
Student 2	Mainly German notes with some Italian words	Only Italian notes
Student 3	Mainly Italian notes with some German words	Only Italian notes
Student 4	Mainly Italian notes with some German words	Only Italian notes
Student 5	Mainly Italian notes with some German words	Only Italian notes
Student 6	Mainly German notes with some Italian words	Only Italian notes
Student 7	Only German notes	Only Italian notes
Student 8	Mainly Italian notes with some German words	Only Italian notes
Student 9	Only German notes	Only Italian notes

TABLE II. CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETING NOTES IN THE GERMAN-ITALIAN LANGUAGE PAIR

It is interesting to observe that even in the German-Italian Consecutive Interpreting note-taking, some C-language (or rather English) words were written, such as the noun “production” which is not shorter than the German equivalent “Produktion”, thus confuting Blaszczyk’s and Hanusiak’s hypothesis.

Independently of the language used, some common mistakes or habits found in the students’ notes are the lack of abbreviation or use of symbols to render the idea and convey the message instead of the words, as stated in first Rozan’s principle “Noting the idea rather than the word” [1]. In fact students waste much time in noting entire words, or in some cases sentences, without effectively listening to what the speaker says.

D. Some Examples of students’ note taking

- Consecutive Interpreting from German into Italian

Here follows a sentence of the German text read to the participants and an example of the respecting notes taken by one of the students.

“Sehr geehrte Frau Presidentin,

Verehrte Gäste,

Liebe Kollegen,

Ich möchte zunächst auf die augenblickliche wirtschaftliche Situation in Deutschland eingehen”

ENGLISH GLOSS

[Dear President,

Dear guests,

Dear colleagues,

Firstly, I would like to talk about the current economic situation in Germany”]

NOTES

Sehr G. F. Presidentin
+ Geste
+ Koll
Situaz eco in D

It is possible to observe that the student noted the terms “Sehr geehrte Frau Presidentin” (dear president), “Gäste” (guests) and “Kollegen” (colleagues) and then just “Situaz eco in D” (economic situation in Germany). The first part of the notes is taken in German and the second one in Italian, indicating the mix of both languages illustrated in the results of this study.

- Consecutive Interpreting from Italian into German

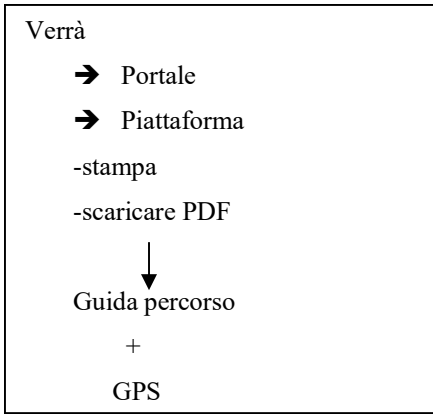
The example below shows an extract of the Italian text to be translated into German and the relating notes taken by another student.

“Verrà realizzato un portale istituzionale con una piattaforma che oltre ad offrire la possibilità di scaricare e stampare gratuitamente in formato pdf la guida del percorso, disporrà di tracce GPS”

ENGLISH GLOSS

[an institutional portal will be created with a platform which will give the chance to download and print free of charge the PDF-guide of the route and it will also provide GPS tracks]

NOTES



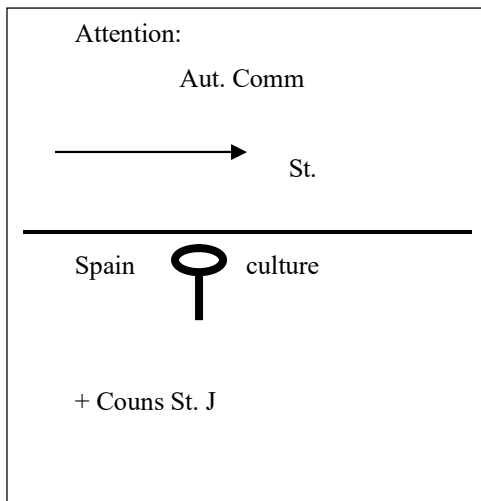
These notes illustrate that all words were written in Italian, considering that Italian was both the A-language and the source language. No term in the B-language or in the target language (that is to say German) can be observed, as stated above.

- Consecutive Interpreting from English Into Italian

Here is an example of a sentence of the English text with the relative notes taken by one of the participants.

“Particular mention must be made of the other autonomous communities the Way passes through, and the Spanish Ministry of Culture, within the framework of the council of Saint James.”

NOTES



In this extract the participant used a mix of abbreviations, symbols and words written only in English.

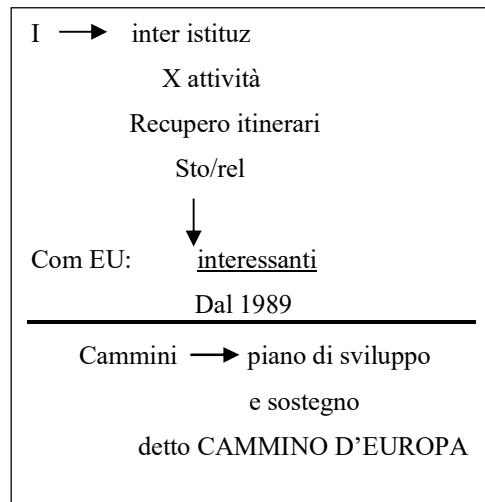
- Consecutive Interpreting from Italian into English

The text and the notes below represent an extract of the Consecutive Interpreting from Italian into English.

“In Italia, il forte interesse istituzionale per le attività di recupero e di valorizzazione degli itinerari storici e religiosi, che la Comunità Europea ha dichiarato di particolare interesse già dal 1989, ha portato al loro inserimento nel piano di sviluppo e di sostegno economico detto Cammini d’Europa”.

ENGLISH GLOSS

[In Italy the strong institutional interest in restoring and developing the historic and religious routes which were declared by the European Community to be of great interest in 1989, led to their inclusion in the Economic development and support plan, called European Routes]



As underlined above, mainly Italian terms can be observed in the Consecutive Interpreting notes from Italian into English, as Italian represents the students’ mother tongue and the source language. In this example, only Italian words were noted by the participant.

IV. OBSERVATIONS

It is interesting to observe that the results found in Consecutive Interpreting from Italian (which is the mother tongue or A-language of all participants) into German and English corroborate Van Dam’s findings for the Spanish-Danish language pair. In fact, according to Van Dam, “other things being equal, writing in one’s first language, i.e. A-language is likely to be easier/faster than writing in one’s B-language because of the probable differences in the levels of mastery of these languages”[2].

What emerged from this study, in fact, is that in Consecutive Interpreting from Italian, in 100% of cases for the Italian-German combination and in 66% of cases for the Italian-English language pair, notes are totally written in Italian, which is both A-language and source language. For Consecutive Interpreting from Italian into English, in the other 33% of cases, just few English words were written.

In spite of what suggested by some authors (such as Herbert, Rozan and Seleskovitch) and teachers, target language in note-taking is never used alone because, as stated by Van

Dam, "taking notes in the target language is different: as two languages – that of the incoming speech and that of the notes – are concurrently present, language conversion or simultaneous activation of the two languages becomes an additional requirement and the note taking task consequently more demanding" [2].

On the contrary, it would seem that no prevalence in note taking exists when interpreters translate from the B-language into the native language or A-language. Some students try to take note in the A-language (or target language) but the result is a mix between target and source language or A-language and B-language.

CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the consecutive interpreting notes of students leads to the hypothesis that notes are taken in the A-language or source language when they coincide. When they do not coincide, it is not possible to state that the A-language is the favourite language to take notes because in some cases, such as in the Consecutive Interpreting from English into Italian, the source language or B-language prevails.

Similarly to what was found by different authors (such as Seleskovitch, Kirchhoff and Andres), interpreting students use a mix of source and target language when translating from the B-language into the A-language, and in some cases only B-language notes or source language notes are written.

According to the present analysis, C-language (or third language) notes can be observed in both language pairs, but unlike Blaszczyk and Hanusiak, the note-taking of these words does not lead to a time saving because of a reduced length of the words. On the contrary, those words are as long as the equivalents. Moreover, initial letters of German words in English-Italian notes were recorded, such as "K" (Kirche) for church, "W" (Wirtschaft) for economy, "A" (Arbeit) for work,

so that it is possible to assume that this C-language exerts a strong influence on the others.

Finally it is worth underlining that these results refer to an analysis carried out on consecutive notes of students. Another variable to be taken into consideration could be the difference between students' and professional interpreters' notes. Future investigations, including data from professionals, could help address this issue and discover more about the choice of language in Consecutive Interpreting note-taking.

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