

A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide, consisting of a light green L-shaped block at the top left and a dark blue horizontal bar below it.

Introduction to Simultaneous Interpreting II

In one sense simultaneous interpretation is the same thing as consecutive interpretation. They are the same in that both mean listening, understanding, analysing and re-expressing. In both cases the interpreter is indulging in the same basic intellectual activities. Moreover, in both cases the interpreter is fulfilling the same function as a

conduit for communication.

It is easy for the interpreter in simultaneous, physically cut-off from the meeting in a sound-proofed booth behind double-glazing, to forget that they are part of the meeting, that they are carrying out this essential communication function.

It is important to avoid this trap, to try to sense the atmosphere of a meeting through the panes of glass, watching the body language of delegates and picking up any non-verbal information they can, using the appropriate intonation in their interpretation, rather than slipping into a monotonous drawl.

Simultaneous interpreters should maintain eye contact as much as possible with delegates and even use gestures in the booth, even though nobody may be watching those gestures.

Thus, to resume our argument, we stress the unchanged nature of the basic interpreting function and the intellectual processes involved. Much of what has already been said about consecutive therefore also applies to simultaneous.

At the same time it is obvious that simultaneous and consecutive are quite different. Essentially, there are two fundamental differences, which create two added difficulties in simultaneous, an acoustic one and an intellectual one.

The acoustic difficulty is that in consecutive the interpreter listens first, and then speaks. In simultaneous, the interpreter has to speak and listen at the same time, which is an unnatural activity and has to be cultivated.

The intellectual difficulty is that in consecutive, when the interpreter opens their mouth they have heard the whole speech and should know where they are going.

The interpreter has no such luxury in simultaneous. You do not know where the speaker is going, even as you speak. And this is true both at the macro level of the speech and at the micro level. That is, at macro level you do not know where the speech as a whole is headed; at micro level, you do not know how an individual sentence will continue, perhaps even something as basic as whether it will be in the positive or the negative form.

The Acoustic Difficulties of Simultaneous Interpreting

Use of equipment

First, you should stack all the cards in your favour by making the best possible use of the equipment available. Despite various possible refinements a simultaneous interpreter's equipment is basically a set of headphones and a microphone.

To deal with the headphones first, interpreters need to be able to hear both the speaker and themselves. One should not think that the speaking side of simultaneous interpreting takes place automatically and that you do not need to monitor yourself, or even that the interpreter will necessarily hear their own voice in their head.

Therefore, the interpreter must wear the headphones in such a way as to be able to hear the speaker clearly but also hear their own output and monitor it all the time. To do this there are essentially two options.

The first is for the interpreter to wear both ear-pieces of a pair of headphones half on and half off each ear, slightly to the front of the ear. This enables one to hear the speaker clearly, the sound coming through the headphones quite satisfactorily into the interpreter's ears while leaving the ears sufficiently uncovered for you to hear your own voice.

The second option is simply to wear one earphone fully on one ear and to leave the other ear totally uncovered. This leaves each ear to perform a different task.

- The interpreter controls the volume at which they listen to the original. It is important to keep this volume as low as feasibly possible. Both the original and the interpreter's own voice have to be listened to, but they should not become like rivals trying to outshout one another.

- As to the microphone, for the comfort of the delegates listening to the interpreter you must try to make sure that the sound output level is as regular as possible. The level of the interpreter's voice should remain fairly constant, a normal conversational one as just mentioned, and the interpreter should sit directly in front of the microphone at a constant distance from it, avoiding major movements either side to side or forwards and backwards.
- In no circumstances should interpreters attempt to interpret what they have not heard. If the working conditions are so bad that they absolutely cannot perform their function correctly they should inform the meeting organizers and either cease work, offer consecutive interpreting as an alternative, or wait for the necessary arrangements to be made.

- *Cultivating Split Attention*

- In normal circumstances people concentrate on one thing at a time, and in speech in particular they listen to one line of discourse at a time.

- The interpreter has to listen to two lines of discourse. How does one deal with this?

- To sum up, cultivating split attention is an unnatural activity. Significantly, it is often the element of conference interpreting which most mystifies non-interpreters. The way to cope with it is to maintain a maximum level of concentration and very deliberately and consciously address your attention to the two discourses in question. In one way simultaneous can be compared to playing the piano, which is also an unnatural form of behaviour. The pianist has to learn the right hand, then the left, then learns to coordinate both, in much the same way as the interpreter learns to listen to two speeches at the same time.

- *Listening to Oneself in Simultaneous Interpreting*

- The critical listening to oneself mentioned above concerns both content and form.

- In terms of content you must be constantly checking that the interpretation is a correct and, insofar as is necessary, a complete rendering of the original.
- In terms of form you must check that you are being grammatical and making sense (as opposed to talking literally nonsense). Here, again, the battle is half won if you can make life easy for yourself, and that can be done by applying just a few basic rules.

- The first rule is to speak, as far as is possible, in short, simple sentences. This approach is to be adopted however long and complex the sentences of the speaker may be.

- Second, you should make sure, in listening to yourself, that each individual sentence has sense, grammatically and logically.

Third, although one might argue that this is just a specific case of the previous rule, the interpreter must always finish their sentences. An unfinished sentence means by definition that the interpreter has stopped making sense.

The ‘Golden Rules’ of Simultaneous Interpreting

The simultaneous interpreter must:

- they are communicating;
- make the best possible use of the technical facilities;
- ensure they can hear both the speaker and themselves clearly;
- never attempt to interpret something they have not heard or acoustically understood;
- maximize concentration;

- not be distracted by focussing attention on individual problematic words;
- cultivate split attention, with active, analytical listening to the speaker and critical monitoring of their own output;

- use, where possible, short, simple sentences;
- be grammatical;
- make sense in every single sentence;
- always finish their sentences.

Thank You!

